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Speaking Being

Language, Body, and the Construction of a World
in Heidegger and Lacan

Christoforos Tombras

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
awarded by Middlesex University

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Abstract

In this thesis, I discuss the basic theoretical hypotheses and models of Lacanian psychoanalysis, taking into consideration Martin Heidegger's critique of science and modernity, and his arguments against (Freudian) psychoanalysis.

I begin by presenting certain key aspects of Heidegger's phenomenology in connection with his central problem, the question regarding the meaning of "being"—i.e., the source of intelligibility of the world for the human being. I follow Heidegger in his argument that there is a rupture between the ancient and modern worldviews, and in his claim that modern science fails to question its foundations. Heidegger's philosophy allows for a deep understanding of the human condition, without having to resort to tacit assumptions about what is subject, object, truth, reality, and the world.

Heidegger's work helps bring out the uncritically accepted presuppositions of psychoanalytic theory, and challenges them. In reviewing the efforts by thinkers like Ludwig Binswanger and Medard Boss to apply Heidegger's insights to psychiatry and psychotherapy I find that they generally fail in their attempts to present compelling theories that can also show their clinical relevance.

I turn to the work of Jacques Lacan, a psychoanalyst deeply influenced by Heidegger's thought. With his rereading and reformulation of Freud's original insights, Lacan presents a post-Freudian metapsychology that can, as I show, respond confidently to Heidegger's critique of psychoanalysis, and reach beyond it. Lacan offers a conceptualisation of the human being as a sexed "speaking being", a being under the sway of jouissance and the signifier. I follow Lacan in his argument that meaning is always floating, unstable, and retroactively established, and discuss his efforts to reach an "ideal" of discursive mathematic formalisation.

This discussion paves the way for an exploration of the basic themes of a possible theoretical exchange between Heidegger and Lacan. I formulate this exchange as a conceptual synthesis, which I provisionally label *Discourse Ontology of the Speaking Being*. In bringing this thesis to an end, I explore five basic themes of this conceptual synthesis—they are: speaking being; truth; language; body; world—and briefly touch on other themes, reflection on which is facilitated by this exchange.



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Introduction

It has become a journalistic cliché to speak of Freud as one of the revolutionary founders of modern thought and to couple his name with that of Einstein. Most people would however find it almost as hard to summarize the changes introduced by one as by the other. Freud's discoveries may be grouped under three headings—an instrument of research, the findings produced by the instruments, and the theoretical hypotheses inferred from the findings—though the three groups were of course mutually interrelated.

James Strachey¹

They were indeed revolutionary, but even so—or perhaps precisely because of this—Freud's discoveries have not been met with unreserved acceptance. Psychoanalysis has been—and is still being—attacked on all fronts: its assumptions, its methods, its theoretical hypotheses, its conclusions. One of its most serious and penetrating critics was Martin Heidegger, who saw Freud as a 19th-century thinker and argued that Freud's theories are marred by the limitations and restrictions of modern science when it studies the human being.

Jacques Lacan, one of the most important post-Freudian psychoanalysts, claimed that the true spirit of the Freudian discovery had been forgotten or misconstrued and he set out to reformulate it in such a way that would be faithful to its originality and subversiveness, as well as secure from attacks such as Heidegger's or others'. In the process, Lacan—drawing on work that was being done in diverse fields such as anthropology, linguistics, philosophy, and mathematics—created his own version of psychoanalysis, which he insisted on calling Freudian but that could, perhaps, be better described as Lacanian.

In this thesis, I intend to discuss the basic theoretical hypotheses and models of Lacanian psychoanalysis, taking into consideration Heidegger's philosophy of *being*, his critique of modernity, and his arguments against (Freudian) psychoanalysis. It is not intended to be read like a thesis of Heideggerian or Lacanian scholarship, but rather as an attempt to use Heidegger's questioning in order to secure a foundation for Lacanian psychoanalysis. This is a task of fundamental importance to me, a reader of Heidegger but also a practitioner of psychoanalysis. As I intend to show, Heidegger's work is vitally important because it reveals the historicity and limitations of any scientific endeavour, and helps bring out the uncritically accepted presuppositions of psychoanalytic theory. In many ways, I see Heidegger as propaedeutic to Lacan.

I will approach my subject matter from different angles: How pertinent can Heidegger's philosophy be to the study of human suffering as attempted by psychoanalysis? How vulnerable is Freud's discovery to Heidegger's questioning? Did Lacan manage to shield it from Heidegger's attack?

¹ James Strachey, 'Sigmund Freud: A Sketch of his Life and Ideas' [1962] in James Strachey and Angela Richards (eds.), *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (Pelican Freud Library, 2; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), 11-24, p. 17.

Is their thinking compatible with each other's? Is a conceptual synthesis at all possible and, if yes, what would be its main themes?

A philosophical challenge

In the third decade of the 20th century, Heidegger challenged philosophy to rethink the question of *being*, a rather obscure philosophical question that had traditionally been thought of as having been settled for good.² Not so, in Heidegger's view.

Heidegger's insight was that by picturing human beings as cognitive observing agents who act within an environment, we fail to recognise that initial moment when *being*, as he called it, is itself "unconcealed". It is this unconcealment that makes possible a human being's comportment—cognitive, observatory or manipulative—towards the beings it encounters. Heidegger set out to outline what this means and how it happens in *Being and Time*, published in 1927.³ Heidegger claimed that in order to demonstrate the origin of our basic ontological concepts, it is necessary to deconstruct the history of ideas, or—to use his own words—to *destroy* the history of ontology:

We understand this task as one in which by taking *the question of Being as our clue*, we are to *destroy* the traditional content of ancient ontology until we arrive at those primordial experiences in which we achieved our first ways of determining the nature of *being*—the ways which have guided us ever since.⁴

Heidegger's work shows that epistemology is preceded by ontology; still, ontology is mediated by language. It is in this *circle of understanding*, as he would call it, that the key to grasping the essence of the human being in its 'being-human' lies.

Heidegger's work represented a major challenge to any other philosophical or scientific attempt to study the world in general and the human condition in particular, and it exerted an enormous influence on the course of 20th-century philosophy, to the extent that he has been called "the last universally recognisable philosopher."⁵ It gradually became clear that its repercussions were much more far-reaching than immediately thought, with its impact especially felt in other disciplines that were also taking the human being as their subject matter—such as psychiatry, psychology, and psychoanalysis.

In Heidegger's view, sciences of the human being fail to grasp the totality of the phenomena they study; they miss their essence and almost unavoidably distort them. This stems from a major limitation of modern science in general, which, according to Heidegger, not only confuses what can be measured and studied objectively with what is real but also remains oblivious to this confusion.

² For the term *being* see below, p. 7n1.

³ *Being and Time* exists in two different English translations, one by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1962) and one by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996). Both have their respective merits, but sometimes differ in terms of readability and clarity. I will be using mainly the former, as it was the first to be published, and has been more widely used than the other, with a lot of secondary literature conforming to its terminological and translation choices. If I need to use the Stambaugh translation, this will be explicitly noted. To facilitate cross-referencing, references to either edition, will also include the German original page number after a slash.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* [1927], trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1962), p. 44/22.

⁵ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* [1988], trans. Oliver Feltham (New York: Continuum, 2005), p. 1.

Medical science, psychology, and psychiatry are trapped in the conceptual framework of modern science, which rests on the picture of a scientist *qua* observer who focuses objectively on his or her subject matter, and studies its *objects*. In contrast, Heidegger held that the relation of man to the world is not one of subject to object, or observer to observed, as people (and scientists) are accustomed to believe. He argued that any such conceptualisation is an interpretative abstraction founded on a more primordial unity, which he designated with the combined term *being-in-the-world*: the world concerns us and becomes intelligible to us because we human beings-in-the-world are already opened up to, and comported towards, *being*. The inaugurating event of opening up to *being* is lost for each and every one of us, in the sense that we have lost awareness that it ever happened. This opening up is mediated through language, and entails, as such, an implicit but all-pervasive worldview, which, in itself, is not questioned. The very method of science predetermines what it can speak about; science is not in a position to question itself or its subject matter as such. Such a task is for philosophy.

A science for the psyche?

Freud did not share Heidegger's view. He was a scientist, and envisaged psychoanalysis as a proper science that studies psychic or mental phenomena. In Freud's work, psychoanalytic theories—its metapsychology, as he called it—are constructed, tested, revised, extended, and even abandoned in much the same way as any other scientific theories. He never claimed that psychoanalysts enjoy any kind of infallibility. Psychoanalytic theorising advances carefully, hesitantly and slowly—quite unlike philosophy, which, in Freud's view at least, seems always to need to have the answer to every question. Freud stressed that psychoanalysis is a science and, as such, very tolerant of temporary ignorance and contradiction. He insisted that it is equipped with all the tools it needs to proceed on the path it sets out to take.

The question regarding the scientific status of psychoanalysis, of major importance for Freud, has been—and still is—debated. Consensus has not been reached, but most thinkers who are friendly to psychoanalysis would agree that psychoanalysis—even if it does not become the hard science that Freud envisaged—can at least be thought of as a rational, interpretative endeavour. Heidegger's questioning could be seen as forming part of the same debate. His philosophy directly calls into question Freud's optimistic and straightforward conception of science. In Heidegger's view, Freud was a thinker who was operating solidly within the limited and naïve conceptual framework of the 19th-century natural sciences. As such, the various claims of psychoanalysis—the claim, for example, that it has the concepts and tools that allow it to reach beyond what is immediately apparent and study the human psyche (or mental life) in its totality and in all its manifestations—are completely baseless, if not absurd, in Heidegger's view. For Heidegger, psychoanalysis not only fails to study the human being in his or her suffering; it actually distorts phenomena in its effort to make them fit within what he considers an incongruous and mechanistic conceptual framework.

This is where Jacques Lacan enters the picture. Lacan, one of the major post-Freudian psychoanalysts and theorists, explicitly acknowledged the influence Heidegger's ideas had had on his own work, at least at the early stages of his teaching. He believed that the spirit and radical nature of Freud's discovery were being misconstrued by psychoanalysts who paid more attention to a supposed biology of instincts, to phylogenetic inheritance, or to physiological development and adaptation to

the demands of life. Freud's discovery, in Lacan's view, consisted in recognising the extent to which human suffering is dependent on, and subject to, language. Lacan remained for a long time true to his pledge to "return to Freud" by reading Freud's texts closely and referring to them again and again. Lacan's reading of Freudian theory led him to the development of an entirely new psychoanalytic theory, one whose *regional ontology*—to use one of Heidegger's terms—was very remote from Freud's.

Aims and scope of this work

While I do not agree with all of Heidegger's criticisms, I hold that psychoanalysis cannot remain silent before the challenge he represents. I think—and in what follows I will try to show—that Heidegger's philosophy allows for a deep understanding of the human condition, without resorting to tacit assumptions about what a subject is, what an object is, what truth is, what the real and the knowable are, and what knowledge is. As I will argue, the elucidation of such concepts is of paramount importance for psychoanalysis; taking Heidegger's ideas into consideration and responding to them rather than blissfully ignoring them is imperative if psychoanalysis intends to establish its own philosophically robust foundation, one that would support the justification both for its theoretical formulations and for its clinical practice.

I will also argue that psychoanalysis, especially in the Lacanian orientation, allows a deeper understanding of the phenomena that are part and parcel of the human condition, and that it too can complement, enrich, or better Heidegger's understanding. The Lacanian reading and reformulation of Freud's original insights, with its emphasis on language as world-disclosing (but also alienating), parallels, as I will show, both Heidegger's philosophy and his view of language as the "house of *being*".⁶ It is my opinion that however insurmountable their differences—in terminology, scope, and method—Heidegger and Lacan meet in more than just trivial ways.

At a cursory glance, French philosopher Alain Badiou's work—an oeuvre in which he explicitly refers to Heidegger's re-positing of the ontological question and to Lacan's post-Cartesian conceptualisation of the divided subject—seems to largely overlap with this point of view. As Badiou has argued, we are now

the contemporaries of a *third epoch* of science, after the Greek and the Galilean. We are equally the contemporaries of a second epoch of the doctrine of the Subject ... [and the] contemporaries of a new departure in the doctrine of truth ... [which] crosses the paths of Heidegger (who was the first to subtract it from knowledge), the mathematicians (who broke with the object at the end of the last century, just as they broke with adequation), and the modern theories of the subject (which displace truth from its subjective pronouncement).⁷

Badiou purports to construct a fully-fledged philosophical system in an attempt to respond to the challenges of what he conceives as a new epoch of science, the subject, and truth. Badiou's understanding and use of crucial terms such as "being", "event", "truth", and "subject" appears to be highly idiosyncratic and largely incompatible with the ways in which Heidegger and Lacan employ

⁶ Martin Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism' [1947], trans. Frank A. Capuzzi, in William McNeill (ed.), *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 239-276, p. 239.

⁷ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 3.

them. He is not interested in Heidegger's critique of Freudian theory or in the intricacies of Lacan's understanding of the speaking being. These are precisely the issues that interest me.

While a full correspondence between Heideggerian and Lacanian ideas may be neither possible nor useful, my aim in this thesis will be to examine whether there is any merit in attempting a theoretical exchange between some of their respective positions and discussing points of contact and divergence. I will also endeavour both to outline the themes of a possible conceptual synthesis and to indicate some further lines of discussion thus opened up.

The first two chapters will focus solidly on Heidegger. I will begin, in the first chapter, with his question regarding *being*. I will introduce his method—phenomenology—and set out the framework of his *Analytic of Dasein*. I will discuss the crucial “ontological difference”, i.e., the difference between *beings* (as entities of this world) and *being* as such, and introduce concepts such as *being-in-the-world*, *being-with-others*, equipment, language, historicity, time, event of appropriation and death. I will also show how Heidegger's exploration of the question of *being* allowed him to discern its historical character.

This general outline will allow me to proceed, in the second chapter, with Heidegger's critique of science, and especially with his views on medical science, psychiatry, and psychology, all as presented by Heidegger himself during his so-called *Zollikon Seminars*, delivered regularly to a group of doctors, psychiatrists, and psychologists over a period of more than 10 years. I will present Heidegger's argument that there is a rupture between the ancient and the modern worldview, as well as his claim that modern science fails to question its implicit assumptions and is unable to acknowledge its major shortcoming, namely the confusion between what is measurable and what is real. I will focus on Heidegger's critique of sciences that study the human being, such as medicine, psychiatry, psychology, and, of course, Freudian psychoanalysis. I will argue that psychoanalysis is vulnerable to this critique and cannot afford to ignore it.

In the third chapter, I will review how Heidegger's ideas and concepts were taken up by thinkers such as Ludwig Binswanger and Medard Boss, and then applied to contemporary psychotherapy and psychiatry. They were implicitly or explicitly claiming that their work was a direct application of Heidegger's insights, and for this reason I will examine their ideas from a Heideggerian point of view, focusing on questions such as their conceptual coherency or their clinical relevance. After revisiting Heidegger's critique of psychoanalysis, I will present some elements from the work of Hans Loewald and William Richardson, two psychoanalysts whose thinking was informed by Heideggerian ideas.

My focus, from that point on, will move to Jacques Lacan, a psychoanalyst who called for a return to the original spirit of Freud's discovery, which, in Lacan's view, consisted in recognising the extent to which human psychic suffering is dependent on, and subject to, language. Lacan was especially influenced by Heidegger's thought and this, I will argue, is evident in his rereading of key Freudian concepts such as the unconscious. I will also give an outline of some of Lacan's own contributions, such as the mirror stage, the signifier, *jouissance*, the three registers of experience (real, symbolic, and imaginary), and object *a*.

Lacan's conceptualisation of the human being as a being subject to the law of the signifier will lead in the fifth chapter to the discussion of Lacan's theory as a post-Freudian “metapsychology”. By using this term—which Lacan himself largely avoided using in connection with his own work—I am

referring to the fundamental concepts of Lacan's theory and the questions opened by them. I will discuss Lacan's understanding of language as a network of interconnected signifiers and present his thinking about issues such as "signifierness", temporality and historicity, psychic structure, discourse, and sexuation. Special attention will be given to Lacan's critique of traditional ontology and metaphysics and to his efforts to reach an "ideal" of mathematic formalisation.

In the sixth and final chapter of this thesis, I will explore the possibility of a theoretical exchange between Heidegger and Lacan. Having discussed the ways in which psychoanalysis is vulnerable to Heidegger's critique, as well as Lacan's strategies to address this critique in his own re-reading of Freud, I will present five themes of a potential conceptual synthesis between Heidegger and Lacan, which I provisionally label as *Discourse Ontology of the Speaking Being*. These themes are: speaking being, language, body, world, and truth. In bringing this discussion to an end, I will briefly touch upon some further important themes, reflection on which is facilitated by the conceptual synthesis presented.



Chapter 1: Heidegger's question of *being*

Heidegger's *Being and Time* begins with a quote from Plato's *Sophist*. In this dialogue, a character called Stranger is speaking with two other characters, Theaetetus and Theodorus, and attempts to show them how people (philosophers and non-philosophers alike) talk about *being* without really knowing what that means.¹ We should invite them to explain, Stranger says to his interlocutors. We need to tell them that we do not understand and that we are in a difficulty. Please do explain, we should tell them, "for manifestly you have long been aware of what you mean when you use the expression 'being'. We, however, who used to think we understood it, have now become perplexed."²

For Heidegger, this very question has long been pushed aside and forgotten, and needs to be raised anew; moreover, the question remains as difficult and perplexing as ever, but people have forgotten even this.

We, human beings, conceive of ourselves as subjects present in a "here and now", each one of us in our observing individuality, turned towards a world that lies "objectively" out there. And when we ask ourselves about the world and the beings we encounter in it, we are readily able to refer to an explanation—or to an explanatory attempt—about how they found themselves in front of us. Now and again we allow ourselves to wonder at the miracle of existence, but we do this only temporarily, only in as far as we contemplate life, the past, the future, creation, and so on and so forth. Soon we change our stance and resume our ordinary comportment—that of taking things for granted, acting as agents engaging with a world which is open to us and available for our inspection. For Heidegger, this picture is problematic because it is limited and misleading. It is limited because it tends to overlook many aspects of our being human; and it is misleading because it obscures *this very fact* of overlooking.

This is the task Heidegger sets himself: "Our aim in the following treatise is to work out the question of the meaning of *being* and do so concretely."³

In what follows I will outline Heidegger's strategy to tackle this task. Finding myself in agreement with Thomas Sheehan's radical new reading of Heidegger's philosophy,⁴ I will approach Heidegger's work as a work "about one thing only: sense or meaning ... both in itself and in terms of its source", and I will explain how, for Heidegger, our picturing human beings as cognitive observing agents within an environment fails to take into consideration the ways, and the extent to which, our comportment

¹ In what follows, and whenever is necessary for reasons of clarity, I will be contrasting the term *being* (i.e., the italicised gerund of the verb "to be"), which will be taken to represent the German form *Sein* (i.e., the infinitive of the verb "be"), to the term being without any formatting, which will be taken to mean "entity", or something that "is" (in German: *seiend*). Quoted passages of Heidegger or others will be changed as needed, in order to conform to this convention and help retain some uniformity in this text.

² Plato, quoted in Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 17/1.

³ *Being and Time*, p. 17/1.

⁴ See Thomas Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

toward things bespeaks, i.e. shapes, “their meaningful presence within the worlds of [our] interests and concerns”.⁵ Starting with Heidegger’s method, phenomenology, I will focus on Dasein, i.e. the human being in its concerned comportment towards beings, and will discuss Dasein’s fundamental structure of engagement as being-in-the-world. I will show how this line of enquiry allows one to see *being* as disclosed by its temporal horizon (i.e. presence), and leads to a conceptualisation of truth as unconcealment, rather than correspondence (of statements to states of affairs). As I will show, for Heidegger, Dasein’s access to *being* is always mediated through language and in this sense *being* itself is only revealed in its historicity. As Sheehan puts it, “underlying the whole of Heidegger’s philosophy is the fact that we cannot encounter anything outside the parameters that define us as human—as a thrown open, socially and historically embodied λόγος [logos].”⁶ It is for this reason, I argue, that Heidegger’s thinking is crucial for probing the limitations of any philosophical, scientific, or psychoanalytic enquiry.

Reactions to a puzzling question

Much has been written in an attempt to explicate not only the question of *being*, as such, but also Heidegger’s insistence on the need to return to it. Both are puzzling. Why is such a thing necessary? Why is it so important in our era of modern science, philosophy, mathematics, technology, and computers to preoccupy ourselves with such ruminations? Is it not the case that they have already been tacitly answered? Are the collective intellectual and material achievements of humanity not evidence enough that, really, there is no puzzle to solve?

Many scholars, commentators, and philosophers saw this question as a mystical question beyond the horizons of human understanding, a question pertaining more to religion and theology. Many were, and some still are, tempted to dismiss Heidegger’s efforts as obscure, mystical, or even plainly nonsensical. As an example one can take Paul Edwards, an American philosopher, belonging to the school of analytic philosophy, who has written a short book titled *Heidegger’s Confusions*. His aim was stated clearly in the preface: “Until fairly recently, Heidegger was not taken seriously by philosophers in Great Britain and the United States. Unfortunately this is no longer the case. One goal of the present study is to stem this tide of unreason.”⁷

For the British logical positivist A. J. Ayer, the problem was not just that of unreason. In his view, Heidegger had displayed “a surprising ignorance” and engaged “in an unscrupulous distortion” which could be “fairly described as charlatanism.”⁸

Other writers thought they discerned in Heidegger’s philosophy the suffering of a troubled personality. An example would be American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Richard Chessick, who drew something like a psychological profile or “psychogram” of Heidegger. Chessick described him as

⁵ *Making Sense*, p. xii.

⁶ *Making Sense*, p. 209.

⁷ Paul Edwards, *Heidegger’s Confusions* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2004), p. 9. Edwards’s arguments reveal a deep hostility to, but also a deep misunderstanding of, Heidegger’s project, as I will have the opportunity to show later in the text.

⁸ Alfred J. Ayer, *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* [1982] (London: Orion Books, 1992), p. 228.

a “pathological narcissist” who had suffered a “narcissistic regression” because of his alleged disillusionment with Hitler. For Chessick, Heidegger’s philosophy was “the philosophy of a despairing, aging, and disappointed man.”⁹ Another example would be an assessment by the much more kindly disposed George Atwood and Robert Stolorow: they claimed that a “psychobiographical” reading of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* would unveil

the ontology of Dasein ... as a *symbol* of Heidegger’s own anguished struggle and individuality and grounded authenticity in a world where he felt in perpetual danger of absorption in the pressures and influences of the social milieu.¹⁰

Stolorow was unconvinced with regard to the radicalism of Heidegger’s question of *being*, as is evident in passages like the following:

We believe that the progressive reification and even deification of *being* in Heidegger’s later philosophy ... is a distinctively Catholic one. The turn in Heidegger’s later philosophizing was thus actually a re-turn to the Catholic heritage of his childhood, a self-restorative dream of returning to being-at-home once again.¹¹

Misunderstandings and hostility aside, the actual meaning of Heidegger’s question remains obscure. According to Herman Philipse, the various interpretations can be seen as falling somewhere along an axis with two extremes, one which he calls a *unitarian* interpretation, according to which “there is *one* more or less precise meaning of Heidegger’s question that remains the same throughout his philosophical career,” and one which he calls a *patchwork* interpretation, according to which “there is no substantial meaning of Heidegger’s question of being. The formula of the question of *being* is an empty one, or at best a chameleon that changes its meaning from passage to passage.”¹²

But even if we decided to focus on the opinions put forward by adherents of the *unitarian* interpretation—presumably friendlier, or at least not overtly hostile, to Heidegger’s project—we would not be able to find any consensus.

An example of a careful, not overtly critical attitude, can be found in D.W. Hamlyn’s *History of Western Philosophy*. As Hamlyn writes, for Heidegger “the fundamental metaphysical question is why there is anything rather than nothing. ... So, his starting-point is what he takes to be a fundamental distinction between *Sein* (being) and *Dasein* (being there, being in the world).”¹³

Now, asking why there is anything rather than nothing is indeed a metaphysical question that has troubled philosophers for centuries. For Leibniz, it was directly related to questions about the origins of the world, space, matter, and, ultimately, God.¹⁴ Nowadays, it would be thought of as a

⁹ Richard D. Chessick, ‘The Effect of Heidegger’s Pathological Narcissism on the Development of His Philosophy’ in Jeffery Adams and Eric Williams (eds.), *Mimetic Desire: Essays on Narcissism in German Literature from Romanticism to Post Modernism* (Drawer, Columbia: Camden House, 1995), 103-118, p. 118.

¹⁰ George E. Atwood and Robert D. Stolorow, *Structures of Subjectivity: Explorations in Psychoanalytic Phenomenology and Contextualism* (Hove: Routledge, 2014), p. 20. For the question of social milieu and the links between Heidegger and Nazism see below, pp. 15-17.

¹¹ Robert D. Stolorow, *World, Affectivity, Trauma: Heidegger and Post-Cartesian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 100.

¹² Herman Philipse, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Being: A Critical Interpretation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 68, 71.

¹³ D. W. Hamlyn, *The Pelican History of Western Philosophy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 323.

¹⁴ See Daniel Garber, ‘Leibniz: physics and philosophy’ in Nicholas Jolley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 270-352.

question of cosmology rather than one of metaphysics or philosophy. "What is the nature of reality?" asks Stephen Hawking. "Where did all this come from? Did the universe need a creator? ... Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but philosophy is dead. Philosophy has not kept up with modern development in science, particularly physics."¹⁵

Heidegger does indeed bring this question up in his *Introduction to Metaphysics*: "Why are there beings at all instead of nothing? That is the question. Presumably it is no arbitrary question. 'Why are there beings at all instead of nothing?'—this is obviously the first of all questions."¹⁶

He discusses the question at length and concludes that what we really are doing is

asking about the ground for the fact that beings are, and are what they are, and that there is not nothing instead. We are asking at bottom about *being*. But how? We are asking about the *being* of beings. We are interrogating beings in regards to their *being*.¹⁷

Clearly, this is a very different question from the one asked—and responded to—by cosmologists. Consider, for example, Hawking's conclusion:

Because there is a law like gravity, the universe can and will create itself from nothing ... Spontaneous creation is the reason there is something rather than nothing, why the universe exists, why we exist. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the universe going.¹⁸

Hawking takes the question as a question regarding the possibility of establishing a causal chain. He reassures us that we do not need to invoke God; instead he invokes the law of gravity and the process of spontaneous creation. The assumption that the universe operates according to laws that are knowable is taken for granted. Hawking believes that philosophy has not kept up with science, but the only justification for his belief is the fact that he chooses to ignore philosophy. It's not that his assumptions are necessarily wrong—they may not be—but rather that he thinks he can proceed without examining them. Heidegger's project is an invitation to examine them.

Still, many scholars remained unconvinced. Ayer, for one, was not impressed at all. "Why is there anything at all and not rather nothing?" he asked. "This should be treated ... as the senseless querying of an absolute presupposition. At least, if it is treated as a question, there is no way of answering it. ... Perhaps the question is deliberately drafted in order to be unanswerable."¹⁹

¹⁵ Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design: New Answers to the Ultimate Questions of Life* (London: Bantam Press, 2010), p. 5.

¹⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics* [1935], trans. Gregory Field and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 1.

¹⁷ *Introduction to Metaphysics*, p. 31.

¹⁸ Hawking and Mlodinow, *Grand Design*, p. 180.

¹⁹ Ayer, *Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*, p. 229.

Making sense of the problem

In his *Commentary on Being and Time*, Hubert Dreyfus writes that “Heidegger’s primary concern is ... to make sense of our ability to make sense of things.”²⁰ Dreyfus believes, that is, that Heidegger’s main focus is our understanding of *being*, presumably something of which sense can be made.

Richard Polt, in his *Heidegger: An Introduction*, sees things differently: “When we ask, ‘What is the meaning of *being*?’” he explains,

we are trying to enhance our understanding of *being* itself. *Being* plays a role in our lives, but we understand it only darkly and vaguely. In order to reveal *being* more clearly, we have to place it within the appropriate context or horizon.²¹

Polt thinks, in other words, that Heidegger’s focus is *being* as such, and not just our vague understanding of it.

In disagreement with both, philosopher William Richardson reads Heidegger’s problematic as a questioning regarding the grounding of philosophy, i.e., metaphysics. If philosophy is

a tree whose roots are metaphysics ... what, Heidegger asks, is the ground in which metaphysics is rooted? The unequivocal answer: *being*. *Being* can be called, then, the ground on which metaphysics, as the root of the philosophy tree, is held fast and nourished. To interrogate the ground of metaphysics, we must pose the ‘ground’-question, the question about the sense [or meaning] of *being*.²²

A somewhat different interpretation is suggested by Walter Biemel, a student of Heidegger: “Heidegger’s inquiry into the meaning of *being* is presented as fundamental ontology ... intended ... to offer an analysis of the mode of being of the inquirer ... distinguished from all other entities by the fact that he builds a certain relationship to himself.”²³

For his part, Rüdiger Safranski, author of an important biography of Heidegger, believes that Heidegger’s question about *being* can be understood through *time*: “The meaning of *being* is time,” he writes. “But time is not a cornucopia of gifts, it gives us no content and no orientation. The meaning is time, but time ‘gives’ no meaning.”²⁴ Time is also at the centre of Otto Pöggeler’s interpretation of Heidegger’s project in *Martin Heidegger’s Path of Thinking*:

If metaphysics thinks of *being* as constant presence, does it not then conceive of it from a specific mode of time, the present? ... If this equation, *being* is constant presence, is no longer accepted as a matter of course, then the question about the sense of *being* can emerge as a question about *being* and time.²⁵

All these views have something in common but are also quite dissimilar. Thinking about our “understanding” of *being* is similar, but not identical, to interrogating the ground of metaphysics;

²⁰ Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), p. 10.

²¹ Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 25.

²² William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* [1963] (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), p. 7.

²³ Walter Biemel, *Martin Heidegger: An Illustrated Study*, trans. J. L. Mehta (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 30.

²⁴ Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 153.

²⁵ Otto Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking* [1963], trans. Daniel Magurshak and Sigmund Barber (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1987), pp. 33-34.

focusing on the mode of being of the inquirer is not clarified if we say that the meaning of *being* is time. What they have in common is the human *being*. There would be no “understanding” of *being* without an agent capable of understanding; there would be no metaphysics as such if there were no human beings engaging with such questions; indeed, any discussion about the “meaning” of being always, and necessarily, involves the supposition of a human being capable of discerning, or perhaps just wondering about, this meaning.

As I see it, when Heidegger invites us to rethink the meaning of *being*, he is not concerned with formulating a scientific (or, for that matter, philosophical) explanation for how or why things “are” or how things came to “be” as such; the Kantian *Ding an sich*, or thing-in-itself, is not the focus of his questioning,²⁶ nor is the question of the traditional metaphysics of existence versus inexistence. He is not concerned with the workings of nature, or with the deep structure or origin of the universe—at least not in the way a cosmologist would be concerned. Heidegger’s question is not *why* there is anything rather than nothing; rather, it is what does it mean when we say that there *is* something. *This* is the question about the sense (or meaning) of *being*, a question that, as Pöggeler reminds us, “is placed before the question about the manifold expressibility of *being*,”²⁷ i.e., before the question about the various ways things, or entities, or beings present themselves to humans.

This is Heidegger’s starting point—the observation that we, humans, are concerned with and do things with entities we come across in our world: other human beings, animals, plants, natural phenomena, objects, tools, artefacts and so on. All these we call “beings” and we may be observing them, talking about them, talking to them, talking with them, remembering them, forgetting them, handling them, studying them, manipulating them, creating them, destroying them, modifying them. Human beings comport towards beings in thousands of ways, and tend to think that this state of affairs is self-evident and transparent. As Heidegger writes,

There are many things which we designate as ‘being’, and we do so in various senses. Everything we talk about, everything we have in view, everything towards which we comport ourselves in any way, is being; what we are is being, and so is how we are. *Being* lies in the fact that something is, and in its *being* as it is.²⁸

The question of *being*, then, is a question that only makes sense to *humans*, i.e., it is a specifically *human* question. However abstract or elaborate our thinking, the whole issue is specifically human and involves or concerns humans, and humans alone. We humans cannot even arrive at the question of *being* unless we have already an understanding of entities as beings. *Being* is that on the basis—and because—of which entities present themselves to us and concern us. Strictly speaking, there would be no such a thing as *being* if there were no humans concerned with it: *Being* is the *product*—and, as will be shown, the *prerequisite* too—of the concerned comportment of humans towards what they encounter, i.e., beings. Or, in the words of Heidegger: “*What is asked about is being.*” Namely “that which determines entities as entities, that *on the basis of which* entities are already understood.”²⁹

²⁶ For the Kantian thing-in-itself see, for example, Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy: With Especial Reference to the Formation and Development of Its Problems and Conceptions*, trans. James Hayden Tufts (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1901), p. 541.

²⁷ Pöggeler, *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, p. 34.

²⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 26/6-7.

²⁹ *Being and Time*, pp. 25-26/6 (emphasis added).

As Thomas Sheehan points out, Heidegger's work "both early and late, was not about 'being' as Western Philosophy has understood that term in over twenty-five hundred years, but rather about sense itself: meaningfulness and its source."³⁰ In order to be able to observe, conceive, understand, describe, or contemplate our dealings with the world and its objects—with beings in general—we, human beings, already employ a tacit understanding of what *being* is. It is not meant by this that we have an understanding of each and every entity or being we encounter, but rather that we are open, in some fundamental way, to beings as such. Sheehan explains: "Human being is the 'open space' or clearing within which the meaningful presence of things can occur."³¹

This task, to enquire about our tacit understanding of *being*, is a necessary one insofar as we are interested in what it is to be human, what the horizon of human engagement with, and understanding of, the world is, and what the domain of human knowledge is.

One could contend here that this argument involves some kind of circularity. For Heidegger, however, the contention is beside the point:

Formal objections such as the argument about 'circular reasoning', which can easily be cited at any time in the study of first principles, are always sterile when one is considering concrete ways of investigating.³²

In the question of the meaning of *being* there is no 'circular reasoning' but rather a remarkable 'relatedness backward or forward' which what we are asking about (*being*) bears to the inquiry itself as a mode of *being* of an entity.³³

The 'circle' in understanding belongs to the structure of meaning, and the latter phenomenon is rooted in the existential constitution of Dasein. ... An entity for which, as being-in-the-world, its *being* is itself an issue, has, ontologically, a circular structure.³⁴

So, for Heidegger circularity cannot be—and should not be expected to be—avoided in any study of first principles.³⁵

Heidegger used the term "Dasein" to denote this human being "which in each case I myself am,"³⁶ and used the compound expression *being-in-the-world* to denote the fact that Dasein—or human beings in general—are primordially in a world. We will return to these two terms, but let us now say, as a rough indication, that for Heidegger it is nonsensical to conceive of the world as a kind of container that might contain (or might *not* contain) human beings. Dasein, the world, and the fundamental configuration of Dasein as being-in-the-world are disclosed at the same time—*equiprimordially*, as Heidegger writes, meaning that neither of them takes precedence over the other.

Paul Edwards is rather ironic with regard to this point:

³⁰ Sheehan, *Making Sense*, p. xi.

³¹ *Making Sense*, p. xv.

³² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 27/7.

³³ *Being and Time*, p. 28/8.

³⁴ *Being and Time*, p. 195/153.

³⁵ For the *circle of understanding* see *Being and Time*, p. 195/153. See also the discussion on the use of *circle* and *circular thought* in Erasmus Schöfer, 'Heidegger's Language: Metalogical Forms of Thought and Grammatical Specialties' [1962], trans. Joseph J. Kockelmans, in Joseph J. Kockelmans (ed.), *On Heidegger and Language* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 281-301, pp. 281-287.

³⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 78/53.

Heidegger's teaching that man is the *Da* of Being, the 'site of openness' and 'the clearing of Being', is supposed to constitute a great discovery. I do not see that it is anything of the kind. When the metaphors are eliminated, his assertion comes to no more than that of all known entities human beings are the only ones who are reflectively conscious of the world, who not only see, hear, touch, and taste objects but also think about them and ask questions about their meaning and value. The 'world' is here used broadly so as to include human beings themselves. Calling this a platitude is not quite right, but it hardly qualifies as a discovery.³⁷

Edwards misses Heidegger's point entirely: Heidegger draws our attention to the fact that when humans think and ask about the world, they think and ask about something (i.e., *being*) that has been *opened* to them, and that the world they think and ask about is only *that* world that they *do* think and ask about. How does this happen? What does this mean? The question of *being* is exactly *this*; and Heidegger re-draws our attention to it, claiming that it has been forgotten—this precise forgottenness that, unbeknownst to Edwards, his own argument exemplifies.

At the heart of Heidegger's enquiry we find a verb used to denote being in its various senses—namely the verb “to be”. All the distinct uses of the verb—for example, when we say “the cat is on the mat,” or “the cat is grey,” or “the cat is a cousin of the tiger,” or “the cat is mine,” or “the cat is looking at you,” or “the cat is pleasant,” or “the cat is in my mind”—denote different aspects of *being* of that entity known as “cat” without reference to any specific or necessary reality. I speak about the “cat,” but I could very well be speaking about a unicorn, a squared circle, a ghost, or a golden mountain.

When I use the verb “to be”, I make it possible for a specific state of affairs to become part of my world. It is this sense of Heidegger's problematic which escapes of his critics. We see for example Edwards writing

To begin with, Heidegger totally fails to distinguish between the 'is' of predication ('the sky is blue'), the 'is' of identity ('a triangle is a plane figure bounded by three straight lines') and the 'is' of existence ('there is God'). ... Although serious, this confusion is not the main trouble here; the main trouble is Heidegger's totally uncritical assumption that is-ness or Being must belong to or be 'in' things.³⁸

The error here lies with the critic. Heidegger does not assume that is-ness belongs or *is* in things. Rather he claims that is-ness makes it possible for things to become parts of Dasein's world. How? What does this mean? Admittedly this is hard to say, but then this is exactly what Heidegger's enquiry is about. He asks about the meaning of *being*. That is the primary question. The differentiation between the 'is' of predication, identity, existence and the like is *not* primary. It comes after.

My utterances allow the world, beings inside this world, and *being* in general to reveal themselves to me, and to become an issue for me. Whether they are “true” or not—in the traditional understanding of *truth* and truth values—is irrelevant.³⁹ As Heidegger puts it, “Language is the house of *being*.”⁴⁰ This, of course, does not mean that I, as a speaking human being, *create* the world—or the whole of reality, for that matter—in any factual or tangible sense, merely by using language:

³⁷ Edwards, *Heidegger's Confusions*, p. 25.

³⁸ *Heidegger's Confusions*, p. 37.

³⁹ On Heidegger's conception of truth see below, pp. 23-26.

⁴⁰ Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism', p. 239.

Only as long as Dasein *is* (that is, only as long as an understanding of *being* is ontically possible), 'is there' *being*. When Dasein does not exist ... even entities within-the-world can neither be discovered nor lie hidden. *In such a case* it cannot be said that entities are, nor can it be said that they are not.⁴¹

In other words, a sunset on an exo-planet around Alpha Centauri cannot seriously be said to have been "created" by human beings. Yet it can only *be* (i.e., be beautiful, spectacular, frightening, boring) in the eyes of human beings—those beings who comport themselves towards *being*, and for whom *being* is an issue.

Heidegger, Nazism, anti-Semitism

A discussion about the importance of Heidegger's thought would be incomplete without reference to those who have claimed that Heidegger's connections with Nazism would be enough to discredit his whole philosophy once and for all. The debate forms a major part of the field of Heidegger studies, a "Heidegger affair" of sorts, as Jeff Malpas has it.⁴² Works such as Victor Farías's *Heidegger and Nazism* offer a thoroughly negative presentation of Heidegger's Nazi links, while others present a more moderate picture, such as the one advocated by Hugo Ott in his *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life*.⁴³ A more recent and rather damning addition to the debate is Emmanuel Faye's *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933-1935*.⁴⁴

Even though some (but not all) of the many anti-Heideggerian arguments in this context have been rebutted or exposed as ad hominem,⁴⁵ I too am of the opinion that one should certainly be very concerned if Nazi ideals could be shown to be unambiguously discernible in Heidegger's philosophy *as such*. Such a claim does not seem to be so easy to substantiate. In the words of Richard Rorty, Heidegger's thought

was, indeed, essentially anti-democratic. But lots of Germans who were dubious about democracy and modernity did not become Nazis. Heidegger did because he was both more of a ruthless opportunist and more of a political ignoramus than most of the German intellectuals who shared his doubts.⁴⁶

If anything, Heidegger can be readily accused, with regard to Hitler and the Nazi ideology, of having been unequal to the occasion. According to Jorge Alemán and Sergio Larriera, Heidegger "did not

⁴¹ *Being and Time*, p. 255/212.

⁴² Jeff Malpas, 'On the Philosophical Reading of Heidegger: Situating the *Black Notebooks*' in Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas (eds.), *Reading Heidegger's Black Notebooks 1931-1941* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), 3-22, p. 3.

⁴³ See Victor Farías, *Heidegger and Nazism*, trans. Paul Burrell and Gabriel R. Ricci (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989); and Hugo Ott, *Martin Heidegger: A Political Life* (London: Fontana Press, 1994).

⁴⁴ Emmanuel Faye, *Heidegger: The Introduction of Nazism into Philosophy in Light of the Unpublished Seminars of 1933-1935*, trans. Michael B. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

⁴⁵ Farías's book, for example, has been deemed "dishonest" by David Farrell Krell in his *Daimon Life: Heidegger and Life-Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 157; while, reviewing Faye's book Thomas Sheehan wonders "whether Faye is a fraud or simply incompetent". Thomas Sheehan, 'Emmanuel Faye: The Introduction of Fraud Into Philosophy?' *Philosophy Today*, 59/3 (2015), 367-400, p. 367.

⁴⁶ Richard Rorty, 'Philosophy as Science, Metaphor, Politics' [1986], *Essays on Heidegger and others: Philosophical Papers, Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 9-26, p. 19n27.

measure up to his own philosophy; in effect he betrayed his project.”⁴⁷ Similarly, Edwards has written that

none of this ... should make the slightest difference to our judgement of Heidegger's philosophy ... We simply have to realise that, whether we like it or not, greatness in philosophy can no more be correlated with decency and kindness than greatness in mathematics or microbiology.⁴⁸

The debate is far from over, and after the recent publication of the first batch of Heidegger's *Black Notebooks*, called like this after the black oilcloth booklets into which Heidegger transcribed his thoughts, it will certainly be rekindled.⁴⁹ These *Black Notebooks*—full as they are of anti-Semitic slander—span, as Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas explain, the years from 1931 to 1941. It is believed that there are in total some 34 to 36 such notebooks, the last of which were written in the early 1970s.⁵⁰ An English translation of the texts covering the years 1931 to 1938 has just been published.⁵¹

Writing in 1992 about Heidegger's silence in connection to Nazism's crimes and the Holocaust, David Farrell Krell was unequivocal:

His silence concerning the fate of European Jewry between 1933 and 1945 is a failure of thinking, *ein Versagen des Denkens*. More than that, worse than that, yes, but at least that. ... Failure to break the silence concerning the Holocaust or Extermination implies a failure of the thinking itself.⁵²

After the publication of the *Black Notebooks*, Krell returns to this very question:

To say the least, there is something about Heidegger's silence even after the War that reflects an astonishing mindlessness. ... The militancy of Heidegger's nationalism which seems to be responsible for much if not all of the oblivion, is truly disconcerting. ... No reader of Heidegger can or should be able to make his or her peace with Heidegger's (or their own) nationalism, militancy, and decisionism.⁵³

Krell might be onto something when he notes that the “odd alternating current of piety and polemic” sometimes evident in Heidegger's work of the period needs to be understood in what he calls

⁴⁷ Jorge Alemán and Sergio Larriera, *Desde Lacan : Heidegger* (Málaga: Miguel Gómez Ediciones 2009), p. 10 (my translation).

⁴⁸ Edwards, *Heidegger's Confusions*, p. 15. For a similar conclusion see T. Sheehan's remarks in Sheehan, *Making Sense*, pp. 272-275.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Phillip Oltermann, 'Heidegger's "black notebooks" reveal antisemitism at core of his philosophy' *The Guardian* (13 Mar. 2014), <www.theguardian.com/books/2014/mar/13/martin-heidegger-black-notebooks-reveal-nazi-ideology-antisemitism>, accessed 16 Apr. 2016; and also Joshua Rothman, 'Is Heidegger Contaminated by Nazism?' *The New Yorker* (28 Apr. 2014), <<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/is-heidegger-contaminated-by-nazism>>, accessed 31 May 2016. For some comments see Jonathan Rée, 'In Defence of Heidegger' *Prospect Magazine* (12 Mar. 2014), <www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/arts-and-books/in-defence-of-heidegger>, accessed 10 Apr. 2016. A very balanced view is presented in Jesús Adrián Escudero, 'Heidegger's Black Notebooks and the Question of Anti-Semitism' *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual*, 5 (2015), 21-49.

⁵⁰ See Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas, 'Introduction' in Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas (eds.), *Reading Heidegger's Black Notebooks 1931-1941* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2016), ix-xiv, p. ix.

⁵¹ Martin Heidegger, *Ponderings II-VI: Black Notebooks 1931-1938*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

⁵² Krell, *Daimon Life*, p. 138.

⁵³ *Ecstasy, Catastrophe: Heidegger from Being and Time to the Black Notebooks* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), pp. 189-190.

Heidegger's *paranoetic* thinking. Not *paranoid* thinking, inasmuch as there here there is no being, no *Seiendes*, to be feared and hated. ... Not paranoid thinking inasmuch as in Heidegger's case there is no being that can be sought out and blamed for the unspeakable catastrophe that is about to advene.⁵⁴

This is a situation “worse than paranoia,” Krell argues, in which “no one and no thing is to blame, but only beyng.”⁵⁵ Whether he is right, I cannot say. But I find myself in agreement with his conclusion:

The perplexing, and even disconcerting fact is that Heidegger did an extraordinary amount of serious work precisely at the time he was jotting polemics, lamentations, and pieties into his *Black Notebooks*. ... It would be a terrible thing were this kind of serious work to lose its standing because of the *Notebooks*.⁵⁶

The case remains that Heidegger has done an extraordinary amount of serious work. As Joshua Rothman concedes, “it’s impossible to disavow” this work; “it is too useful, and too influential, to be marginalized.”⁵⁷

The method: Phenomenology

At the end of the 19th century, the German philosopher Franz Brentano was studying the human mind in the context of its intentionality. For Brentano, psychology's focus of study should not be the mind's contents but rather its acts. He thought that in any psychical phenomenon there is a direction of the mind to its objects, and he considered this to be the mind's inherent *intentionality*.⁵⁸ One of Brentano's students, Edmund Husserl, took the idea of intentionality and made it the starting point for a philosophy of consciousness that would be structured with scientific rigorousness. According to Husserl's maxim, “we must go back to the things themselves”⁵⁹; by this he meant that any philosophy of consciousness cannot but focus on the objects that this consciousness is intending towards and to its ways of operation. For Husserl, the objects that appear to consciousness (a thing, a memory, a feeling, a desire) are “phenomena”; accordingly, their study should be called phenomenology.⁶⁰

The term “phenomenology” came to prominence because of Husserl, but he did not invent it. It had started appearing in philosophical texts in the 18th century and was used by philosophers such as Kant, who has given the title “Phenomenology” to a section of his 1786 book *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, and Hegel, who had used it in the title of *Phenomenology of Spirit* written in 1807.⁶¹ The method of Husserl's phenomenology was to *arrest* consciousness at its intentional acts by putting in “brackets”, as he described it, both the intentional acts as such and the intended objects. He called

⁵⁴ *Daimon Life*, p. 199.

⁵⁵ *Ecstasy, Catastrophe*, pp. 6-7. “Beyng” is a rendering of the German *Seyn*, an archaic spelling of *Sein* (*being*) which Heidegger used in later works.

⁵⁶ *Ecstasy, Catastrophe*, p. 191.

⁵⁷ Rothman, ‘Is Heidegger Contaminated by Nazism?’.

⁵⁸ See Dermot Moran, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 47-49.

⁵⁹ Husserl, quoted in *Introduction to Phenomenology*, p. 93.

⁶⁰ See *Introduction to Phenomenology*, pp. 106-107.

⁶¹ See *Introduction to Phenomenology*, pp. 6-7.

this adopting the *phenomenological attitude*. The condition of being bracketed was called *epoche* (in Greek: *εποχή*), i.e., suspension (in this case, suspension of intentionality).⁶²

Heidegger was one of Husserl's students and was, for a period, thought of as his successor. Heidegger had come to Husserl through Brentano. His thought was oriented to questions of ontology and, more specifically, to the question of *being*. As he explained, he was introduced to the question by reading Brentano's 1862 dissertation, *On the Manifold Sense of Being in Aristotle*.⁶³ He understood that the concept of a consciousness which tends itself towards objects was not adequate to answer the questions in which he was more interested. He realised that, by focusing on consciousness and its intentional acts, one is inadvertently presupposing a basic structure of comporting towards entities that involves the assumption of a distinction between subject and object. He thought that such a distinction cannot withstand serious scrutiny, and, taking Husserl's maxim—*To the things themselves*—to the extreme, argued that consciousness is but one aspect of the human being's engagement with the world.

Heidegger's phenomenology was not identical to Husserl's. Like Husserl, Heidegger too called for a return *to the things themselves*, but for him this call meant a return to Dasein's primordial understanding of *being*. He disagreed with Husserl's phenomenology, which takes consciousness and its objects as its starting point. For Heidegger, consciousness is not—and cannot be—a primary concept.

To highlight this different understanding, Heidegger dedicated a specific section of *Being and Time* in order to introduce it properly.⁶⁴ He took the two terms that comprise the term, "phenomenon" and "logos", and traced them back to their ancient Greek origins. Phenomenon (in Greek: *φαινόμενον*) is that which shows itself, the manifest. And far from being what we cursorily call "discourse", "ratio", "reason", etc., logos (in Greek: *λόγος*) in its original sense means, according to Heidegger, to make manifest that what is being talked about.⁶⁵ Thus, for Heidegger, the term "phenomenology", instead of being simply the name of one school of philosophy amongst many, was taken to mean "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself."⁶⁶ The phenomenological method of investigation was, for Heidegger, an attempt to observe and study ("to let be seen") what is there to observe and study ("that which shows itself") in an unmediated way ("from itself") without any presuppositions such as the existence of an observing, subjective position, or a differentiation between a subject and an object ("in the very way in which it shows itself").

⁶² See Robert Sokolowski, *Introduction to Phenomenology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 47-50.

⁶³ See Martin Heidegger, 'Preface (Letter to W. Richardson)' in William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), viii-xxiii, p. x.

⁶⁴ See §7 in *Being and Time*, pp. 49/27-63/39.

⁶⁵ There has been a certain amount of criticism regarding Heidegger's use of etymology and his knowledge of ancient Greek, but as Matthew King has argued, "the purpose of [Heidegger's] method is not to replace degraded modern concepts with purer archaic ones ... [but] to recover the *whole range* of historical meanings of a word." Matthew King, 'Heidegger's Etymological Method: Discovering Being by Recovering the Richness of the Word' *Philosophy Today*, 51/3 (2007), 278-289, p. 278.

⁶⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 58/34.

Ontological difference

In contrast to Husserl's phenomenology, which was concerned with the study of consciousness in its various intentional acts, Heidegger's variety purported to study nothing less than the comportment of human being—Dasein—towards *being*, the historicity and meaning of *being*, and the difference between *being* as such and the various beings that Dasein might encounter in its world. Heidegger dubbed it *ontological difference* and explained:

Ontic and ontological truth each concern, in different ways, *beings in their being*, and *being of beings*. They belong essentially together on the grounds of their relation to the *distinction between being and beings* (ontological difference).⁶⁷

The ontological difference is of crucial importance, as Heidegger's whole project depends on it:

The possibility of ontology, of philosophy as a science, stands and falls with the possibility of a sufficiently clear accomplishment of this differentiation between *being* and beings and accordingly with the possibility of negotiating the passage from the ontical consideration of beings to the ontological thematisation of *being*.⁶⁸

Heidegger distinguished between a *narrow* and a *wider* sense of the ontological difference: The narrow one is related to the difference of beings from their *own being*, i.e., in terms of their *whatness* and *howness*, and is equivalent in some way to the traditional questions of metaphysics; the wider one, Heidegger's original contribution, so to speak, is related to discerning the difference of beings, *and* their own being, from *being* as such.⁶⁹ It is this wider sense that makes it possible to see what is at stake when the question of *being* is considered: namely, the passage from an *ontic* engagement with entities which vaguely concern us to a proper *thematization*, as he calls it, of this engagement as an ontological question of *being* as such and it is in this sense that it is regularly misunderstood.

The confusion might be accentuated by the fact that some entities, or structures can be seen as both ontic and ontological. These are either entities which Dasein encounters as ontic entities, but which indicate the ontological structure in which they belong, forming part of a *circle of understanding*, as Heidegger puts it, such as *signs*; or structures of Dasein's engagement with entities, which have both ontic and ontological aspects, such as *care*.⁷⁰ The ontological difference is not a difference in degree of some quality—say a difference in the degree of abstraction. There is no continuum between the ontic and the ontological aspect of an entity or structure. One could picture it more like a rupture between two levels of engagement (or involvement, or reference), each of the two facilitated by the other, but with no continuity or communication between them.

Dasein and being-in-the-world

Heidegger's exploration of the question of *being* begins with the observation that even though this question seems to be crucial, its importance slips away as soon as we stop keeping it clearly in focus.

⁶⁷ 'On the Essence of Ground' [1929], trans. William McNeill, in William McNeill (ed.), *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 97-135, p. 105.

⁶⁸ *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* [1927], trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 227.

⁶⁹ See Sheehan, *Making Sense*, p. 199.

⁷⁰ For "care" see below, pp. 22-23.

However, we humans do have an understanding of *being* even before it occurs to us that there is a question at all; if that was not so—i.e., if we did not have such an understanding—we would be oblivious to the whole issue. In fact, we don't even have a choice in that matter, because for as long as and as soon as we find ourselves in the world, *being* has already made itself understood by us. It is revealed to us in a most intimate and yet elusive way: in our dealings with other humans and with the other entities in the world, in our bodily existence, in our conception of ourselves and of others, in all aspects of our life, *being* is already there. But *being* is not *a* being, it's not an entity (ontological difference); it is that which makes our comportment to entities, to other beings—human or not—possible. "The question of the meaning of *being* becomes possible at all only if there *is* something like an understanding of *being*. Understanding of *being* belongs to the kind of *being* which the entity called 'Dasein' possesses."⁷¹ In other words, this question is tantamount to the question of explicating this originary understanding of *being*.

In his study, his "analytic", as he called it,⁷² Heidegger employed two crucial concepts. The first was Dasein, which we have already encountered. The term comes from the German adverb "*da*", *there*, and the infinitive "*Sein*", *to be*, or *being*. It was sometimes translated as *there-being*, but nowadays it is commonly left untranslated, written as a single word (*Dasein*) or hyphenated (*Da-sein*) to stress the original, spatial sense of the term.⁷³ Dasein is sometimes understood as a synonym of "human being", and in a way it is; it is, however, a human being seen in its being-human, i.e., not a specific human being, but a human being *as such*, in its bodily existence, in its engagement with the world, in its history. In *Being and Time* Heidegger introduces Dasein as "this entity, which each of us is himself, and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its *being*."⁷⁴ He does not use the term to denote some special kind of human engagement with the world. "Dasein" is just a technical term that describes what we are, each and every one of us, at any given moment.⁷⁵

The second concept was *being-in-the-world*. For Heidegger, the notion of a world conceived somehow as a *container* of entities—the earth, the sky, rocks and rivers, plants and animals, human beings—is nonsensical. The world does not *contain* things; the world *is* all these things and all these things *are* the world, in a fundamental sense. The human being *qua* Dasein cannot but be-in-the-world. As Heidegger explains, "The compound expression 'Being-in-the-world' indicates, in the very way we have coined it, that it stands for a unitary phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole."⁷⁶ Dasein cannot but be conceived in its being-in-the-world. We *are* in the world in the most complete sense of the verb "to be". We are in the world and this cannot but be so. The world is revealed to us in our purposeful engagement with it, not as something that we choose to inhabit, nor

⁷¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 244/200.

⁷² See *Being and Time*, p. 33/12.

⁷³ For reasons of uniformity and clarity in what follows I will be using the non-hyphenated form, "Dasein". Quoted passages of Heidegger or others will also be modified as needed, in order to conform to this convention.

⁷⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 27/7.

⁷⁵ Heidegger did not invent the word *Dasein*. In the 17th century the word was used in the sense of *presence* while in the 18th century it was used by philosophers as synonym to *Existenz*, and generally in the sense of *life*. In (at least pre-Heideggerian) everyday speech Dasein was used for the being or life of persons. For a full discussion of the term as used by Heidegger see "Dasein" in Michael Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), pp. 42-44.

⁷⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 78/53.

as something that we may choose to observe: "Subject and Object do not coincide with Dasein and the world."⁷⁷

Dasein and being-in-the-world are equiprimordial. Both of them reveal themselves to be relevant to our investigation when we attempt to consider our engagement with the world as it is. One might choose to subscribe to a "scientific" point of view, according to which the world can be thought of as an environment of objects that a human being approaches as an observing subject; but as soon as one tries to question these concepts a bit further, one can see that terms such as "subject", "object", "consciousness", and "observation" already include a primordial understanding of what is at stake—here, that a world of subjects, and objects, and observations has already been revealed before one can even conceive of or subscribe to a "scientific" point of view. As Hubert Dreyfus points out, we should not make the "Cartesian" mistake, which many readers of Heidegger make, of thinking "of Dasein as a conscious subject."⁷⁸ Heidegger, too, refers to this explicitly: "One of our first tasks will be to prove that if we posit an 'I' or subject as that which is proximally given, we shall completely miss the phenomenal content of Dasein."⁷⁹

Dreyfus emphasises that "Heidegger holds that all relations of mental states to their objects presuppose a more basic form of being-with-things that does not involve mental [i.e., conscious] activity."⁸⁰ It is only because Dasein has a primordial openness to *being* that concepts such as consciousness can be formulated. Similarly, the structure described as being-in-the-world is understood as more primordial to "world" or to "beings" of this world.⁸¹

In connection to this, Richard Polt writes that "the question of *being* is deeper than the question of knowing. Ontology precedes epistemology."⁸² But this, strictly speaking, is not the case: both concepts, epistemology *and* ontology, belong in, and obtain their content from, a tradition of metaphysics that Heidegger wants to "destroy". Traditional ontology—which can be defined as the study of *being*—studies beings in their respective regions, rather than in the fundamental manner that Heidegger demands. Neither ontology nor epistemology would be possible without the primordial revelation of *being* that Heidegger postulates. "Phenomenology is our way of access to what is to be the theme of ontology, and it is our way of giving it demonstrative precision. *Only as phenomenology, is ontology possible.*"⁸³ And elsewhere he clarifies further: "*Fundamental ontology*, from which alone all other ontologies can take their rise, must be sought in the *existential* [i.e., ontological] analytic of Dasein."⁸⁴

⁷⁷ *Being and Time*, p. 87/60.

⁷⁸ Dreyfus, *Commentary*, p. 13.

⁷⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 72/46.

⁸⁰ Dreyfus, *Commentary*, p. 52. Heidegger's criticism of the concept of consciousness has profound implications to any science of consciousness (e.g., to psychology) but also to psychoanalysis. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁸¹ Dreyfus writes that for Heidegger "the bare objects of pure disinterested perception [such as the ones Husserl identifies and studies] are not basic things we can subsequently use, but the debris of our everyday practical world left over when we inhibit action". *Commentary*, p. 47.

⁸² Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 47.

⁸³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 60/35.

⁸⁴ *Being and Time*, p. 34/13.

Existence, concern, care

Heidegger used the term *existence* to denote “that kind of *being* towards which Dasein can comport itself in one way or another, and always does comport itself somehow,”⁸⁵ and constructed two adjectives that pertain to this term and reflect the ontological difference: The term *existential* pertains to existence as Dasein’s way of *being* (i.e., its scope is ontological), while the term *existentiell* pertains to some particular Dasein’s ontical issues (i.e., its scope is ontic).⁸⁶ Dasein

takes priority over all other entities in several ways. The first priority is an *ontical* one: Dasein is an entity whose *being* has the determinate character of existence. The second priority is an *ontological* one: Dasein is in itself ‘ontological’, because existence is thus determinative for it.⁸⁷

The term “existence” is understood here in a far narrower sense than in traditional metaphysics, where the existence of an entity is contrasted to its essence. The Heideggerian term applies only to Dasein: “The term ‘existence’, as a designation of *being*, will be allotted solely to Dasein. *The essence of Dasein lies in its existence.*”⁸⁸ To stress this, and to highlight Dasein’s openness to *being*, Heidegger sometimes writes “ex-sistence” or “ek-sistence”. As Joseph Kockelmans explains,

this term, [ek-sistence] is to be understood to mean ‘to ek-sist’: ‘to stand out’. Man ... is an ek-sisting subject that places itself outside itself in the world; he ‘stands out toward’ the things in the world and the world itself. ... Ek-sistent man is essentially a worldly reality that ‘gives meaning’.⁸⁹

So, Dasein, finds itself involved in a world that is *opened* to it by its comportment towards beings. For Dasein, to exist is to be-in-the-world; upon this primordial “concerned dwelling”, Dasein founds its knowledge and belief.⁹⁰ But establishing knowledge and forming beliefs are not our primary attitudes towards the world. The primary one is our concerned comportment towards the beings we encounter. Heidegger uses the term “care” (in German: *Sorge*) to denote exactly this: “Being-in-the-world is essentially care.” And further down in the text: “Care, as a primordial structural totality, lies ‘before’ every factual ‘attitude’ and ‘situation’ of Dasein, and it does so existentially a priori; this means that it always lies in them.”⁹¹

For Heidegger, it is very important to stress that the term “care” should not be understood in connection to something that Dasein is concerned about or “cares” for.

Existence’s basic kind of being is to be concerned for its being, and this basic kind of being is understood as care. Insofar as existence is essentially being-in-the world, care is co-originally concern. And insofar as existence is being-with-others, existence’s basic of being is likewise concern-for. Being concerned about and being concerned-for are

⁸⁵ *Being and Time*, p. 32/12.

⁸⁶ See *Being and Time*, p. 33/12.

⁸⁷ *Being and Time*, p. 34/13.

⁸⁸ *Being and Time*, p. 67/42.

⁸⁹ Joseph J. Kockelmans, ‘Language, Meaning, and Ek-sistence’ in Joseph J. Kockelmans (ed.), *On Heidegger and Language* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 3-32, p. 9. See also “Existence” in Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, pp. 60-62.

⁹⁰ See §9-11 in Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 68/42-77/52.

⁹¹ *Being and Time*, pp. 237/193, 238/193.

constitutive of care, and when we abbreviate and use just the term 'care' in our explanations, it must be properly meant and concretely understood as care that is concerned about and concerned-for. ... This makes it clear that the basic structure of our existence, which we abbreviate as 'care', encompasses a multitude of phenomena and that we have not come up a simple phenomenon with a simple structure on which the rest are built. Rather, just as being-in-the world, being-with-others, and being-concerned-for-ourselves are all constitutive of existence, so too the ontological meaning of these comportments are co-original.⁹²

Admittedly, *care* is one of those of Heideggerian concepts whose ontological aspect can be easily overlooked or misconstrued. The word *care* itself, especially in English, has connotations of affection and compassion, and leaves room for an ontic reading according to which Dasein's comportment to the world is somehow dependent on a human being's regard or sympathy for others.⁹³ Such a reading would be very far from Heidegger's intention, failing, as it does, to heed to its primarily ontological focus; perhaps unsurprisingly, however, it is rather common.

Truth as unconcealment

The Heideggerian conceptualisation of the human being as "the 'open space' or clearing within which the meaningful presence of things can occur"⁹⁴ and of consciousness as a corollary of a primordial openness to *being* brings the question of truth to the fore. According to Heidegger, traditional views concerning truth are characterised by three "theses":

(1) that the 'locus' of truth is assertion (judgment); (2) that the essence of truth lies in the 'agreement' of the judgment with its object; (3) that Aristotle, the father of logic, not only has assigned truth to the judgment as its primordial locus but has set going the definition of 'truth' as 'agreement'.⁹⁵

Using slightly more up-to-date language, we could say that traditional views concerning truth always involve an observing intellect; one or more observable states of affairs; some kind of language in which statements can be pronounced; and a procedure for deciding the truth value of a valid statement in that language by assessing the degree of correspondence between the statement and a given state of affairs.

In effect, this is a somewhat simplified form of Alfred Tarski's theory of truth. Tarski, a Polish logician and mathematician, had developed this semantic conception of truth by drawing on Aristotle's insights, and also on the medieval view of truth as the correspondence of a thing to the intellect.⁹⁶ Tarski introduced a distinction between an *object language* (containing statements where some state of affairs is described or postulated) and a *metalanguage*, which contains statements *about* the first.⁹⁷

⁹² *Logic: The Question of Truth* [1925-26], trans. Thomas Sheehan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), p. 189.

⁹³ This was the case of L. Binswanger who thought that Heidegger's conception of care is limited and would need to be supplemented with a phenomenology of love. See below, pp. 66-69.

⁹⁴ Sheehan, *Making Sense*, p. xv.

⁹⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 257.

⁹⁶ See Alfred Tarski, 'The Semantic Conception of Truth' [1944] in Maria Baghramian (ed.), *Modern Philosophy of Language* (Washington D.C.: Counterpoint, 1999), 44-63. For a more general discussion see Michael Glanzberg, 'Truth' *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/truth/>>, accessed 10 Apr. 2016.

⁹⁷ See Tarski, 'The Semantic Conception of Truth', pp. 53-54.

So, to give an example, one might have a statement such as, for example, “the cat is on the mat,” and one can decide its truth value by checking its correspondence to “reality”: Is the cat on the mat? Yes: Then the statement is true. No, it’s not: Then the statement is not true. In short: “‘The cat is on the mat’ is true if and only if the cat is on the mat.”

How can one judge whether a cat is on a mat? Or, more generally, how can one wonder about any state of affairs if the state of affairs in question is not already available to one’s observing powers? And who or what can reassure us that one’s judgements about a state of affairs are faithful and *correct*?

These are the questions that interest Heidegger: a question regarding observation, and a question regarding certainty. Addressing the second one, he observes that there are two possibilities here. It’s either our intellect, which is conceived as a subject vis-à-vis objects and has the ability to judge if knowledge conforms to objects; or a divine Creator, who has created all worldly matters according to preconceived *ideas* in its *divine* intellect—which are thought as gauges of *correctness* or truth. Heidegger points out that the latter corresponds to the medieval conception of truth as correspondence (“*veritas est adaequatio intellectus ad rem*”—truth is the correspondence of intellect to thing); while the former is the Cartesian conception of truth, in the form given to it by Kant.⁹⁸

With regard to the first question, it pertains to our being able to observe the state of affairs in question and to wonder about it. Taking up again the example of the cat on the mat, one would need to know beforehand what a *cat* is, what a *mat* is, and what it is for a cat *to be on* a mat. Moreover, one needs a meaningful language in which these observations can be expressed as statements. As Mark Wrathall writes,

there is a necessary connection between our understanding of truth and the way beings are present to our understanding. But ... the relationship between being and truth cannot be explained by existing correspondence theories because we only recognise the correspondence relation between a statement and things in the world posterior to our relating the statement to the world through our ‘comportment’.⁹⁹

In other words, the veracity or truth value of statements is indeed judged by probing their correspondence to the state of affairs that these statements pertain to, but there must have been something in place already. For Heidegger, that “something” is a primordial disclosure of *being*. He asserts that the foundation of “truth” is not the correspondence of statements to a state of affairs, but what he calls the disclosure (or uncovering) of *being* to Dasein:

‘Truth’ is not a feature of correct propositions that are asserted of an ‘object’ by a human ‘subject’ and then ‘are valid’ somewhere, in what sphere we know not; rather, truth is disclosure of beings through which an openness essentially unfolds.¹⁰⁰

Heidegger draws our attention to the fact that the term “truth” (in Latin: *veritas*) is a misled attempt to translate the original ancient Greek concept of *aletheia* (in Greek: ἀλήθεια). He argues that the ancient Greek philosophers, at least before Plato, were able to see that “truth” qua *aletheia* is

⁹⁸ See Heidegger, ‘On the Essence of Truth’, p. 138.

⁹⁹ Mark A. Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment: Truth, Language, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 47.

¹⁰⁰ Heidegger, ‘On the Essence of Truth’, p. 146.

founded on the removal (α -) of *lethe* or forgetfulness (in Greek: *λήθη*).¹⁰¹ This conception of truth implied that there was an initial state where things would present themselves *as they are*, followed by a state where this understanding of how things are has been concealed or forgotten; a-*letheia* would be a state of unconcealment, where forgetfulness is removed and things present themselves again *as they are*.

Dasein, as constituted by disclosedness, is essentially in the truth. Disclosedness is a kind of *being* which is essential to Dasein. 'There is' truth only in so far as Dasein *is* and so long as Dasein *is*. Entities are uncovered only when Dasein is; and only as long as Dasein is, are they disclosed.¹⁰²

This conception of truth captures more concretely the phenomenon of Dasein's openness of comportment towards *being*. Things present themselves to Dasein *as they are* insofar as Dasein has already had a primordial understanding of *being*. Truth qua a-*letheia* is much more basic (in the sense of *fundamental*) than truth thought of as correspondence between a statement and a state of affairs: "If the correctness (truth) of statements becomes possible only through this openness of comportment, then what first makes correctness possible must with more original legitimacy be taken as the essence of truth."¹⁰³ According to Heidegger, this insight of the Greeks has been disregarded. In Wrathall's words, "[Heidegger's] account of unconcealment is meant not as a definition of truth, but rather as an explanation of what makes it possible for propositions to point to the world in just the way the world is."¹⁰⁴

Rorty reads Heidegger's conception of truth qua *aletheia* as Heidegger's attempt to overcome the doctrines of Plato and Descartes, who sought to find certainty and clarity in one's "*powerful, penetrating, deep* insights or arguments—insights or arguments which will put [one] in a commanding position vis-à-vis something or somebody else." According to Rorty, Heidegger is attempting to show that truth, i.e. *being*, "is there only as long as we are here. The relations between it and us are not power relations. Rather, they are relations of fragile and tentative codependence."¹⁰⁵

It might appear here as if Heidegger's problematic echoes the problematic of modern mathematics—whereby truth, in the sense of the truth value of statements (i.e., their *veracity* or correctness), is distinguished from truth in the sense of the framework in which statements can have a truth value (i.e., what Heidegger understood as *aletheia*). This would be a version of Tarski's theory of truth, which in turn draws on medieval and Aristotelian concepts. For Heidegger, however, both truth qua correctness and truth qua *aletheia* are seen as being on the same level of comportment, and not on different levels, as in Tarski's theory—in which the one is the *meta*-level of the other. In other

¹⁰¹ According to Heidegger after Plato, the concept of a-*letheia* declines into correctness, and truth is conceptualised as agreement: "This 'allegory' [of the cave] contains Plato's 'doctrine' of truth, for the 'allegory' is grounded on the unspoken event whereby *ιδέα* gains dominance over *αλήθεια*. ... Thus, the priority of *ιδέα* and *ιδεῖν* over *αλήθεια* results in a transformation in the essence of truth. Truth becomes *ορθότης*, the correctness of apprehending and asserting". 'On the Essence of Truth', pp. 176-177. Regarding Heidegger's use of etymology see above, p. 18n65.

¹⁰² *Being and Time*, p. 269/26.

¹⁰³ 'On the Essence of Truth', p. 142.

¹⁰⁴ Wrathall, *Heidegger and Unconcealment*, p. 48.

¹⁰⁵ Rorty, 'Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism', pp. 31, 33.

words, the ontological difference does not correspond to the difference between language and meta-language.¹⁰⁶

The question, however, is now this: if the essence of truth is that of unconcealment or revelation, and not of correspondence, what is the origin of this revelation? For Heidegger, this is but another form of the question of *being*. Discussing truth (qua *aletheia*) as revelation is tantamount to discussing Dasein's comportment to *being*. "*Being*-true, as *being*-uncovering, is in turn ontologically possible only on the basis of Being-in-the-world. This latter phenomenon, which we have known as a basic state of Dasein, is the *foundation* for the primordial phenomenon of truth."¹⁰⁷ It follows from this that "*being* (not entities) is something which 'there is' only in so far as truth is. And truth is only insofar as and as long as Dasein is. Being and truth 'are' equiprimordially."¹⁰⁸ Heidegger's question, then, takes this form: How is it at all possible for Dasein to have a primordial understanding of *being*?

The world, and beings in the world

In its everyday concerned dwelling in the world, Dasein encounters a multitude of entities. This is not a matter of choice: it's a fundamental structure of being-in-the-world. As Heidegger explains, "we understand ourselves and our existence by way of the activities we pursue and the things we take care of. We understand ourselves by starting from them because the Dasein finds itself primarily in things."¹⁰⁹

The entities that Dasein encounters are of different kinds. Dasein may encounter other human beings; it may encounter animals, plants, or other living creatures; it may encounter entities of the physical world that can perhaps be touched, held, and observed closely; it may also encounter other entities of the physical world that can only be observed from a distance, such as the sun, the moon, the stars; it may also encounter intangible entities, such as a sound; or entities of human origin, such as a tool, a piece of cloth; or intangible (or immaterial) entities, such as a feeling, a sentiment, an illusion, or a memory. The list could go on and on, because it must contain anything and everything that is encounterable by Dasein in the world. From this alone, namely the vast multitude of the beings that can be encountered by Dasein, it follows that beings qua entities do not share the same kind of being. With regard to Dasein, a stone has a different kind of *being* from a tree, and both are beings of a different kind in comparison to, say, a human being, a computer keyboard, or a work of art.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger considers two main categories of beings or entities: human beings (i.e., Dasein) and nonhuman beings. He chooses not to speak about other kinds of entities (for example, animals, cultural artefacts, works of art) because his objective is not to provide an exhaustive catalogue of all possible kinds of *being*, but rather "to provide a preliminary characterization of the phenomenon of world by interpreting *the way in which we at first and for the most part move about in our everyday*

¹⁰⁶ An attempt to eliminate the need for these two different levels has been presented by the Finnish philosopher and logician Jaakko Hintikka. See below, p. 135.

¹⁰⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 261/219.

¹⁰⁸ *Being and Time*, p. 272/230.

¹⁰⁹ *Basic Problems*, p. 159.

world.”¹¹⁰ Heidegger wants to make explicit two crucial differences. The first is the difference between human beings and all other kinds of entities; the second is the difference between entities that Dasein can use, which he calls *ready-to-hand* (in German: *vorhanden*); and entities that Dasein encounters in its dwelling in the world, which he describes as *present-at-hand* (in German: *zuhanden*).¹¹¹ Ready-to-hand entities are available to be employed in some way—for example, a hammer, a piece of clothing, a house. This is in contrast to present-at-hand entities, which are just encountered in their presence—for example, a rock or the broken branch of a tree.¹¹²

In order to make this contrast more clear, Heidegger gives to everything that Dasein encounters in concern the collective name of *equipment* (in German: *Zeug*). He clarifies: “Taken strictly, there ‘is’ no such thing as an equipment. To the *being* of any equipment there always belongs a totality of equipment, in which it can be this equipment that it is. Equipment is essentially ‘something in-order-to...’.”¹¹³ What this means is simply that all equipment exists in reference to other equipment, in a network of interconnections and dependencies that allows each and every entity that is equipment to be what it is. For example a pen, together with ink and paper and writing surfaces and chairs, etc, all belong to an equipmental *whole* that makes writing possible. In general, Dasein uses equipment for something; for example, the pen is used for writing. Equipment always has an *in-order-to* and cannot be thought of without it.

Dasein is in-the-world and cannot but be so—but, also, a world is formed by Dasein, in its concerned dealings with it. This is not a *meta*-world: it does not exist parallel to some other world that could be thought of as more “real”, or as world *proper*. In more than one sense, Dasein’s world is the only world that Dasein *can* occupy, a world that is collectively formed and shared with all other human beings. It is the world that Dasein *has*. “But then”, Heidegger asks,

what about the other beings which, like man, are also part of the world: the animals and plants, the material things like the stone, for example? Are they merely parts of the world, as distinct from man who in addition *has* world? Or does the animal too have world, and if so, in what way? In the same way as man, or in some other way? And how would we grasp this otherness? And what about the stone? However crudely, certain distinctions immediately manifest themselves here. We can formulate these distinctions in the following three theses: [1.] the stone (material object) is *worldless*; [2.] the animal is *poor in world*; [3.] man is *world-forming*.¹¹⁴

These distinctions allow Heidegger to focus on the “*specific relation* that stone, animal, and man in each case has toward *world*. The distinctions in respect of this relation, or in the absence of such a relation, will help to set in relief what we call *world*.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* [1929–30], trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 177.

¹¹¹ H. Dreyfus has suggested the translations *available* and *occurrent* respectively. See Dreyfus, *Commentary*, p. xi.

¹¹² Of course one can say that even a rock or a broken branch can be used for something. This is most definitely so: such entities *can* be used for something but they were *not always* meant to be used for something.

¹¹³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 97/68.

¹¹⁴ *Fundamental Concepts*, p. 177.

¹¹⁵ *Fundamental Concepts*, p. 185.

From signs to language

From the general conception of equipment as something that has an in-order-to, Heidegger proceeds to identify one specific kind of equipment whose in-order-to is to act as a reference to other equipment. This he calls *sign*.

A sign is not a Thing which stands to another Thing in the relation of indicating; it's rather an item of equipment which explicitly raises a totality of equipment into our circumspection so that together with it the worldly character of the ready-to-hand announces itself.¹¹⁶

To put it a different way, a sign is not only an entity which is ready-to-hand, such as a hammer or a pen, but also a special kind of equipment; the sign not only indicates that other entities are equipment too, but also, by being a sign, allows the *equipmentality* of equipment to announce itself. "A sign is something ontically ready-to-hand which functions both as this definite equipment and as something indicative of the ontological structure of readiness-to-hand, of referential totalities, and of worldhood."¹¹⁷

By saying that the sign is *ontically* ready-to-hand and adding that it indicates the *ontological* structure of readiness-to-hand, Heidegger draws a distinction between an entity, as such, and our understanding—or our *being able* to form an understanding—of entities *as such*. It is one thing to see an entity as ready-to-hand (an *ontic* observation) and quite another to see that entities *can be* ready-to-hand (an *ontological* insight). He maintains, in general, that if Dasein did not already have a general primordial understanding of *being*, beings would be unintelligible to Dasein. But Dasein is caught up in its concerned comportment towards the specific beings it encounters and forgets its primordial understanding of *being*.

That which remains *hidden* in an egregious sense, or which relapses and gets *covered up* again, or which shows itself only '*in disguise*', is not just this entity or that, but rather the *Being* of entities, as our previous observations have shown. This *being* can be covered up so extensively that it becomes forgotten and no question arises about it or about its meaning.¹¹⁸

Since signs are, in fact, equipment, they all belong to an equipmental whole, which too is pointed to by significance. In other words, significance (the fact that there are signs, i.e., entities that point to other entities as ready-to-hand) reveals a referential totality, a world:

The 'for-the-sake-of-which' signifies an 'in-order-to'; this in turn, a 'towards-this'; the latter, an 'in-which' of letting something be involved; and that, in turn, the 'with-which' of an involvement. These relationships are bound up with one another as a primordial totality; they are what they are as this signifying in which Dasein gives itself beforehand its Being-in-the-world as something to be understood. The relational totality of this signifying we call '*significance*'. This is what makes up the structure of the world—the structure of that wherein Dasein as such already is.¹¹⁹

So, in Heidegger's conception, signs are special entities, in that they are *ontic and ontological* at the same time. They are *ontic* in that they exist as specific entities in this world and *ontological* in that they

¹¹⁶ *Being and Time*, p. 110/80.

¹¹⁷ *Being and Time*, p. 114/82 (emphasis removed).

¹¹⁸ *Being and Time*, p. 59/35.

¹¹⁹ *Being and Time*, p. 120/87.

point to significance as such—just like *being*, which is not itself an entity, *significance* is not itself a sign either but rather that which makes signs possible.

Heidegger's conception of the sign can be read in parallel to that of the American philosopher, logician, mathematician, scientist, and founder of Pragmatism, Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce had spoken extensively about signs, defining them as "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign or perhaps a more developed sign."¹²⁰ In other words, for Peirce the sign not only represents something but also brings up other signs for anyone who can think of them as being meaningful in any way.¹²¹

Language is a system of signs too. Words are entities ready-to-hand; they share the ontological characteristics of signs, and as such they reveal the ontological structure of their referential totality, that is, of a world. This world is a symbolically articulated world in which Dasein finds itself immersed. It is important to remember that this world is related to but not identical with the world which Dasein finds itself being-in; however, the two worlds, the symbolically articulated one and the one in which Dasein is being-in, are almost always confused and taken as one. It is because of this confusion that modern human beings tend to conceive being-in-the-world as a relationship between a subject and objects: because they tend to see the symbolically articulated world (which consists of references to entities ready-to-hand) as identical to the "world" part of the structure "being-in-the-world". For Dasein, it's not clear what kind of relationship exists between them. This question is obscured, just as the originary meaning of *being* was.

At this point, one might notice that the argument entails again a certain circularity. Language, after all, is created by humans for whom *being* was, presumably, *already* an issue. How can it be that language allows *being* to *become* an issue? Arguments like this reveal a confusion between the ontic and the ontological character of language and a difficulty in seeing how Heidegger's *circle of understanding* operates.¹²² Heidegger considers circularity an important stage in a study of *first principles*, and he insists that it is an indispensable element of philosophical reasoning. An argument against circularity, he says,

misses the decisive issue here, which is an insight into the centre of the circle as such, an insight made possible in such a circling movement and in this alone. For the centre only manifests itself as such as we circle around it. And this is why every attempt to argue away such circularity in philosophy only leads us away from philosophy itself.¹²³

In connection to language it's not difficult to see that this apparent circularity is a product of the confusion between two different axes of reference and disappears as soon as the confusion is clarified. The first axis of reference is that of the individual human being—we could call it the "synchronic axis". For each and every human being, each and every one of us, language is what discloses and reveals *being*. However, it's only after we are within language that we can see human beings in their historical

¹²⁰ Charles S. Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover Publications, 1955), p. 99.

¹²¹ The parallels between Heidegger and pragmatism have been pointed out by others as well. See, for example, Rorty, 'Heidegger, Contingency, and Pragmatism'. See also Leslie Macavoy, 'Heidegger's Anglo-American Reception' in François Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 425-431; and also below, p. 100.

¹²² See above, p. 13. See also Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 194-195/153.

¹²³ *Fundamental Concepts*, p. 180. See also above, p. 13n35.

dimension or historicity—which we could call the “diachronic axis”. In other words, the historicity of the human being, and that of language, become an issue for an individual only after language has revealed *being* to this particular individual; language as such antecedes the individual.¹²⁴

Heidegger is not interested in the origins of language as such, a question that can be readily thought of as ontic. It is of course important that language be ontically available, because only then can *being* be thematised. But this is a sort of a virtuous circle, an upwards spiral: Language allows *being* to be thematised, and *being* makes thinking possible. As Pöggeler explains, “The final paradox of this thought’s circular but never ultimately terminated movement lies in this, that the emergence of the historicity of thought itself happens historically.”¹²⁵ Or, in Heidegger’s words: “*Language makes manifest*. ... It does not produce ... discoveredness. Rather, discoveredness and its enactment of *being* ... are conditions of possibility for something becoming manifest”.¹²⁶

Critics of Heidegger’s position on language, like Cristina Lafont, argue that Heidegger commits “to the generalized primacy of equipment [and] retains the conception of language as a tool.”¹²⁷ Heidegger contradicts himself, according to Lafont, because he is holding the very position that he sets out to destroy, i.e., he sees language as an ontic instrument which, as she writes, can supposedly be used “for the designation of entities independent of it, or for the communication of pre-linguistic thoughts.”¹²⁸ She grants however that in his later writings Heidegger overcomes the inconsistency, but at a cost: “The world-disclosure that is contained in a given language ... is itself not open to revision on the basis of intrawordly experience and therefore cannot be understood as co-determined by our processes of learning.”¹²⁹

In my view, Lafont misses the point: Dasein encounters language “factually”, as an ontic instrument, but this encounter is only possible because *being* is already understood via language’s ontological character. Moreover, the world disclosed by language is not an unmovable and unshakable structure of relations and references; rather it is a network of potentialities within which Dasein maps out its own trajectory in freedom. As Heidegger explains,

with Dasein’s factual existence, entities within-the-world are already encountered too. The fact that such entities are discovered along with Dasein’s own ‘there’ of existence, is not left to Dasein’s discretion. Only *what* it discovers and discloses on occasion, in *what* direction it does so, *how* and *how far* it does so—only these are matters for Dasein’s freedom, even if always within the limitations of its thrownness.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ Heidegger does not employ the terms “synchronic” and “diachronic”, which I borrow from the linguist F. de Saussure. See, for example, Ferdinand De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* [1915], trans. Wade Baskin (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1966), p. 81ff. I am using them in order to underline an aspect of Heidegger’s analysis, which, while not explicitly termed by him, is, however, always present.

¹²⁵ Otto Pöggeler, ‘Being as Appropriation’ [1959], trans. Rüdiger H. Grimm, in Michael Murray (ed.), *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy: Critical Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 84–115, p. 111.

¹²⁶ Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena* [1925], trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 262.

¹²⁷ Cristina Lafont, *Heidegger, Language and World-disclosure*, trans. Graham Harman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 32.

¹²⁸ *Language and World-disclosure*, p. 2.

¹²⁹ *Language and World-disclosure*, p. 7.

¹³⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 417/366.

Being-with others, authenticity, the "they"

If a totality of interconnected references and dependences is revealed qua world to Dasein through language, and if entities, other than human beings, that are encountered are described as either ready-to-hand or present-to-hand, a question arises regarding other human beings.

Heidegger argues that everything that Dasein experiences in its world is shared with other human beings in this world, not only in the ontic sense that equipment or other entities can—and will—be shared, but also in the sense that the referential totality of the world, as revealed by language, as well as language itself, both ontically and ontologically, are themselves shared: "*They are there too, and there with it* [Dasein] ... The world of Dasein is a *with-world*. Being-in is *being-with* Others. Their being-in-themselves within-the-world is *Dasein-with* [in German: *Mitdasein*]." ¹³¹ He stresses that when other people are encountered by Dasein, they are not encountered as objects, which would then need to be recognised by Dasein as beings similar to itself. Rather, they are encountered as being-there, together with Dasein, in the world in which they all dwell.

They are not encountered by first looking at oneself and then ascertaining the opposite pole of a distinction. They are encountered from the *world* in which Dasein, heedful and circumspect, essentially dwells. As opposed to the theoretically concocted 'explanations' of the objective presence of others, which easily urge themselves upon us, we must hold fast to the phenomenal fact which we have indicated of their being encountered in the *surrounding world*. ¹³²

The distinction between self and others, between I and You, is for Heidegger not a primordial one; it does not belong structurally to Dasein's being-in-the-world and being-with others.

This point was contested by Jean-Paul Sartre. In his *Being and Nothingness*, he argued that

the ontological co-existence which appears as the structure of 'being-in-the-world' can in no way serve as a foundation to an ontic being-with ... The relation of the Mitsein can be of absolutely no use to us in resolving the psychological, concrete problem of the recognition of the Other. There are two incommunicable levels and two problems which demand separate solutions.

It may be said that this is only one of the difficulties which Heidegger encounters in passing in general from the ontological level to the ontic level. ¹³³

The existence of an ontological, and hence a priori, 'being-with' renders impossible all ontic connection with a concrete human-reality. ¹³⁴

In my view, Sartre's criticism reveals a limitation of his understanding of Heidegger's project. At the risk of stating the obvious, one needs to remember that Heidegger's method is phenomenological and not deductive. This means to say that the ontological difference can only be recognised as a result of the enquiry regarding the meaning of *being*—the very task undertaken in *Being and Time*. It is *not* a premise from which everything else follows. Therefore is absolutely not valid to speak about a "passing" from an ontological to an ontic level, as Sartre claims. It's not the case that such passing is impossible, or not well thought, or not conceivable; but rather because it's antinomic to the project

¹³¹ *Being and Time*, pp. 154-155/118.

¹³² *Being and Time* [1927], trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 112/119.

¹³³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* [1943], trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 1969), p. 248.

¹³⁴ *Being and Nothingness*, p. 249.

undertaken by Heidegger. In this connection, Tom Rockmore has criticised Sartre for “his superficial reading of Heidegger’s thought” and attributes Sartre’s “near total eclipse in France at present ... to his loss of the philosophical battle with Heidegger for influence in the philosophical discussion.”¹³⁵

Be it as it may, Robert Bernasconi writes that in 1945 Heidegger had privately indicated that he accepted Sartre’s critique of the account of *MitSein*. It also seems that Sartre’s appreciation of Heidegger’s early philosophy deepened as his own thinking developed.¹³⁶

Nonetheless, Sartre’s argument brings up a separate and important question, regarding the recognition of the Other, which, as we will see, will be taken up by Lacan with his introduction of the concept of the mirror stage.¹³⁷

Heidegger argues that, in its everyday being-with others, *Dasein* finds itself absorbed by them. The world that *Dasein* shares with them is a world that dictates every aspect of *Dasein*’s comportment towards the beings it reveals to it. The totality of these beings forms a kind of a public “environment” in which any and all non-human beings are shared, while any and all other human beings are averaged and indefinite:

This being-with-one-another dissolves one’s own *Dasein* completely into the kind of *being* of ‘the Others’, in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the ‘they’ is unfolded. We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the ‘great mass’ as *they* shrink back; we find ‘shocking’ what *they* find shocking. The ‘they’, which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness.¹³⁸

Having introduced the “they” (in German: *das Man*), Heidegger is now in a position to address the question of the tension between the individual and the collective. It can be recalled that *Dasein* is introduced as this kind of being which is always “mine”. And yet *Dasein*’s world, as disclosed to it by language, is always a shared world; ontologically, *Dasein* cannot but *be-with* others. If such is the case, what is the origin, then, of *Dasein*’s *mineness*? “Mine” as opposed to—what? Yours? Whose?

Heidegger explores the question by identifying a distinction between what is *Dasein*’s own (i.e., “mine”) and what is shared. He employs the term “authentic” (in German: *eigentlich*) to designate what is *Dasein*’s own, i.e., not shared, and contrasts it to what is “inauthentic” (i.e., shared). It should be noted here that the English term “authentic” has certain positive connotations that do not exist in the German term and give the false impression that “authentic” is somehow better than “inauthentic”.¹³⁹ This is not part of Heidegger’s intention:

As modes of *being*, *authenticity* and *inauthenticity* (these expressions have been chosen terminologically in a strict sense) are both grounded in the fact that any *Dasein* whatsoever is characterized by *mineness*. But the inauthenticity

¹³⁵ Tom Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy: Humanism, Antihumanism and being* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 129.

¹³⁶ See Robert Bernasconi, ‘Heidegger and Sartre: Historicity, Destiny, and Politics’ in François Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 369-375. Cf. Heidegger’s critique of existentialism in his *Letter on Humanism* Heidegger, ‘Letter on Humanism’, pp. 250-251, 254.

¹³⁷ See below, pp. 105-108.

¹³⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 164/126-127.

¹³⁹ In German the word *eigentlich* comes from the adjective *eigen* which means own, separate, particular. The confusion arises as a side effect of the unwanted connotations of a translation choice.

of Dasein does not signify any 'less' *being* or any 'lower' degree of *being*. Rather it is the case that even in its fullest concretion Dasein can be characterized by inauthenticity—when busy, when excited, when interested, when ready for enjoyment.¹⁴⁰

In other words, the concept of authenticity reflects the different possibilities of Dasein's comportment towards *being* in reference to what is Dasein's own or shared. As an ontological concept, it reflects Dasein's position in the world vis-à-vis the "they"; and as an ontic concept it refers to choice and freedom: "What [Dasein] discovers and discloses on occasion, in *what* direction it does so, *how* and *how far* it does so ... are matters for Dasein's freedom."¹⁴¹

One of Dasein's possibilities is revealed as the one with the utmost authenticity, i.e., one "*which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped*".¹⁴² This possibility is Death, "the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein."¹⁴³ Death, in this conjecture, is not conceived ontically—i.e., as the unavoidable fact of one's demise—but ontologically. Dasein is fundamentally oriented in time as a *being-towards-death*. Death, as the possibility of an absolute impossibility, establishes ontologically Dasein's finitude and provides Dasein with a trajectory and an end.

Historicity, time, temporality

What has been seen by now is that a symbolically articulated and shared world is revealed to Dasein in its concerned dwelling. It was pointed out that what makes this disclosure possible is the fact that there are certain entities that have an *in-order-to* (they are *ready-to-hand* and as equipment belong to an equipmental whole), and more specifically the fact that certain of these *ready-to-hand* entities are *in-order-to* signify other ready-to-hand entities (i.e., they are *signs*).¹⁴⁴

If one looks closely, one will see that this *in-order-to* opens up a further structure. Each *in-order-to* implies a *for-the-sake-of-which*. This *for-the-sake-of-which* is something that *is not yet* but has been opened up as a possibility. For example, you may use a hammer *in-order-to* put a nail in the wall; this is done *for-the-sake-of* decorating the house. Still, that is not the only use of a hammer; it's just a possibility. The hammer as such opens up a myriad of possibilities for Dasein; but so do all the other ready-to-hand entities that Dasein will encounter. This, for Heidegger, is of the utmost importance. Dasein comports itself towards the world at any given moment but is not restricted there; it is always in the world presently but pointing to a possibility of *being* that is *not yet*. In conventional terms, one could say that in its concerned comportment towards entities, Dasein always opens up *future* possibilities.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 68/43.

¹⁴¹ *Being and Time*, p. 417/366.

¹⁴² *Being and Time*, pp. 294/250-251.

¹⁴³ *Being and Time*, p. 294/250.

¹⁴⁴ See above, p. 29.

¹⁴⁵ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 118/86-122/88.

To be opened up to possibilities of *being*: this is Dasein's *historicity*. Dasein is historical, and with it the world itself is historical. Historicity, however, reveals time. In every in-order-to and for-the-sake-of-which, what is revealed is *time*. Time is that which makes the structure of equipmentality possible. Time is also closely related to temporality, i.e., that which allows beings to "step outside" themselves and become temporally meaningful in the three "*ex-stases*", *future*, *present*, and *past*.¹⁴⁶

The text of *Being and Time* ends with a question: "Does *time* itself manifest itself as the horizon of *being*?"¹⁴⁷ Heidegger does not provide an explicit answer, but returns to the question again and again. Several years later, he writes: "*Being* and time determine each other reciprocally, but in such a manner that neither can the former—*being*—be addressed as something temporal nor can the latter—time—be addressed as a being."¹⁴⁸ The ontic presence of beings before Dasein implies and *requires* temporality. As Safranski comments: "The meaning of *being* is time; but time is not a cornucopia of gifts, it gives us no content and no orientation. The meaning is time, but time 'gives' no meaning."¹⁴⁹ Or, in other words, it is because there *is* time that *being* has a meaning. The meaning is given by Dasein.

In his *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism*, William Blattner has suggested that Heidegger's conceptualisation of time is influenced by the transcendental idealism of Kant and, before him, of Leibniz and Plotinus. Blattner calls this *temporal idealism*, and claims that even though Heidegger used it in order to explain what Blattner calls the dependence of *being* on Dasein, Heidegger's attempt fails.¹⁵⁰ In my understanding of Heidegger's project, this criticism does not hold. Heidegger never postulates *being* alongside Dasein: for Heidegger, Dasein can be seen as the locus (or topos) where *being* can be revealed (to Dasein); however, this is not tantamount to saying that *being* is dependent on Dasein, because such a formulation would present *being* as subordinated to Dasein.

Heidegger seems to suggest that the limits of the meaning of *being* are given by a primordial time:

But still more elemental than the circumstance that the 'time factor' is one that occurs in the sciences of history and Nature, is the fact that before Dasein does any thematical research, it 'reckons with time' and regulates itself according to it. And here again what remains decisive is Dasein's way of 'reckoning with its time'—a way of reckoning which precedes any use of measuring equipment by which time can be determined. The reckoning is prior to such equipment, and is what makes anything like the use of clocks possible at all.¹⁵¹

To put it differently, there are, as Michael Roubach explains, "three layers of time [which] are linked by dependency relations: ordinary time presupposes world time, and world time presupposes primordial temporality."¹⁵² Obviously, when one speaks about time in this context, one does not mean the time of natural sciences but what is primordially revealed to Dasein together with *being* and the

¹⁴⁶ For a discussion see also Sheehan, *Making Sense*, pp. 202–204. Sheehan chooses to misspell ecstasis as "ex-stasis", to stress the etymology. See *Making Sense*, p. xvii.

¹⁴⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 488/437. The term "horizon" here needs to be understood as synonym to a term like *determinant*.

¹⁴⁸ 'Time and Being' [1962], trans. Joan Stambaugh, *On Time and Being* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 1–24, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ Safranski, *Martin Heidegger*, p. 153.

¹⁵⁰ See William D. Blattner, *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 271, 275–276.

¹⁵¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 456/404.

¹⁵² Michael Roubach, *Being and Number in Heidegger's Thought*, trans. Nessa Olshansky-Ashtar (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 51.

world. Roubach argues that in Heidegger's thought the framework of primordial temporality rests upon the concept of number and counting:

Number links the three strata of time: primordial temporality, world time and ordinary time. That is, counting connects primordial temporality, which is essentially finite, to measured time, which is infinite. By virtue of this connection, infinite time is dependent on finite primordial time.¹⁵³

Roubach acknowledges that others do not see it that way—for example, Blattner, who, as we saw above, speaks about Heidegger's temporal idealism. Roubach's argument is convincing in that it allows us to understand how primordial temporality can be derived *equiprimordially* from Dasein's comportment towards *being*. The additional step that is needed is provided by the *event of appropriation*.

Apart from revealing itself as the horizon of *being*, time is also the horizon of Dasein. Historicity is only possible because of the world and Death. In a way that is vaguely similar to the way in which signs point ontologically to signification as such, the certainty of one's own Death gives a foundation to Dasein's historicity, a direction (or sense) to time, and points ontologically to Dasein's possibilities. To put it differently, it is because there is Death that the ex-static, or historical, dimension of Dasein—as being rooted in a past and headed towards a future—is revealed. The importance that Heidegger gives to Death, then, does not reflect some morbid preoccupation with the non-living on his part. Quite the opposite. Death is what provides an ontological foundation for Dasein's authenticity and Dasein's possibilities, in terms of that for-the-sake-of-which Dasein is orienting itself. Indeed, one could say that for Heidegger the ontological certainty of Death is that what opens up Dasein to set about doing its things—in the sense that it provides Dasein with a history and a trajectory. Death, history, and trajectory are unique for each and every human being; the present, however, is always shared.¹⁵⁴

Event of appropriation

One of the more important terms that Heidegger employs is the term “event” (in German: *Ereignis*). In *Being and Time*, it is indeed used in this precise sense, namely *event*, but gradually Heidegger allows it to obtain other connotations, such as making something one's own—which has been sometimes rendered by means of the neologism *enowning*, or appropriating or taking over something—rendered as *appropriation* or *event of appropriation*.¹⁵⁵

As mentioned above, at the end of *Being and Time*, Heidegger had reached the understanding that *being* is disclosed as presence. He was asking whether there is “a way which leads from primordial *time* to the meaning of *being*? Does *time* itself manifest itself as the horizon of *being*?”¹⁵⁶ After *Being and Time*, the task for Heidegger turned, as Daniela Vallega-Neu writes, towards considering the

¹⁵³ *Being and Number*, pp. 59-60.

¹⁵⁴ See Heidegger, ‘Time and Being’, pp. 10-12.

¹⁵⁵ For a discussion see Daniela Vallega-Neu, ‘Ereignis’ in François Raffoul and Eric. S. Nelson (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 283-289, p. 288n3.

¹⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 488/437.

question of *being* “out of the temporal horizon of being as such.”¹⁵⁷ If *being* is disclosed as presence, is there a way to attend to *this* phenomenon—disclosure of *being*—more closely? This would mean, according to Pöggeler, addressing this question: “How is time to be thought of within a ‘fundamental ontological’ investigation if presence itself is to be thought of from the horizon of time?”¹⁵⁸

The conceptualisation of “Ereignis” marks Heidegger’s attempt to look more closely at Dasein’s opening to *being*. This would include both the recognition that *being* is historical (a recognition that would allow him to formulate the problem of modernity in terms of forgetfulness of being), and also to conceive of Dasein’s opening to *being* in terms of what Vallega-Neu describes as Dasein’s being “thrown into the groundless openness of being as such” and being forced to open, so to speak, to the naked possibility of *being*.¹⁵⁹ It is this inaugural occurrence that Heidegger considers as marked by an *event of appropriation*. As he explains, “What determines both, time and *being*, in their own, that is, in their belonging together, we shall call: Ereignis, the event of appropriation.”¹⁶⁰

To paraphrase Vallega-Neu, Dasein is *thrown* in the groundless openness of *being* and *appropriates* it, by giving it a horizon, i.e., time. She writes:

The itinerary of *Being and Time* leads toward the discovery of a temporal horizon out of which *being* discloses as presence; however the path of questioning still goes ‘toward’ the temporal horizon of *being*. ... The task [now] is to think *out of* the temporal horizon of *being* as such, a temporal horizon that since the 1930s Heidegger calls the ‘truth of beyng’.¹⁶¹

Dasein becomes the topos (and agent) of the *event* (of appropriation) that renders *being* into truth.¹⁶² As Pöggeler points out, Heidegger does not wish

to propose that manner in which the event of appropriation needs thought as the hermeneutical circle itself. Instead he wishes in his thought to turn more primordially back to and to dwell in the hermeneutical relationship itself, in which the meaning of *being* is ‘announced’ to Dasein, which already has an understanding of *being*.¹⁶³

In our earlier discussion of the ontological difference, it was stressed that there is no continuity, no *passing* (to use the term that Sartre used) between the two levels, ontic and ontological.¹⁶⁴ The levels are *incommunicable* (Sartre again). Admittedly, Heidegger does not seem to be able to make this distinction clear enough in his earlier writings, thus allowing (unwillingly) for the possibility of

¹⁵⁷ Vallega-Neu, ‘Ereignis’, p. 283.

¹⁵⁸ Pöggeler, ‘Being as Appropriation’, p. 85

¹⁵⁹ Vallega-Neu, ‘Ereignis’, p. 283.

¹⁶⁰ Heidegger, ‘Time and Being’, p. 19.

¹⁶¹ Vallega-Neu, ‘Ereignis’, p. 283.

¹⁶² Cf. Heidegger: “But poetry that thinks is in truth / the topology of *being*. / This topology tells *being* the whereabouts of its actual / presence.” Martin Heidegger, ‘The Thinker as Poet’ [1947], trans. Albert Hofstadter, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 1-14, p. 12. See in this connection Otto Pöggeler, ‘Heidegger’s Topology of Being’, trans. Joseph J. Kockelmans, in Joseph J. Kockelmans (ed.), *On Heidegger and Language* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 107-146.

¹⁶³ ‘Being as Appropriation’, p. 112.

¹⁶⁴ See above, p. 19.

confusion and misinterpretation. With the introduction of the *event*, Heidegger is now able to assert the incommunicability of the ontic and the ontological.¹⁶⁵

Regarding mathematics and logic

The relation of Heidegger's thought to mathematics is generally considered to be marginal. The questions he raises and the way he investigates them seem to be very distant from that of the philosophical schools that hold mathematics and logic in high regard. Indeed, as Roubach writes, "throughout his writings, Heidegger seeks to sever the connection between mathematics and the fundamental questions of philosophy."¹⁶⁶ His position, however, is not a position of blind repudiation and rejection. It is usually overlooked that in Heidegger's early formative years he read extensively in what was then called "natural sciences". Safranski informs us that in the winter semester of 1911–12, after breaking off his theological studies, Heidegger enrolled "in the science faculty of the University of Freiburg, choosing the subjects mathematics, physics, and chemistry, though continuing his philosophical studies with undiminished zeal."¹⁶⁷ His very early writings from that period (his doctoral dissertation, his qualifying dissertation, and other papers) reflect his interest. According to Roubach, Heidegger, in his original introduction to his doctoral dissertation, described himself as an "ahistorical mathematician." As Roubach points out, Heidegger was exploring the relation between ontology, logic, and mathematics, seeking to conceptualise the difference between a *transcendental* conception of numbers (and especially of the number One), and a *particular* one.¹⁶⁸

Later, Heidegger's focus changed. His early interest in traditional ontology gave way to the question of the meaning of *being*; and any discussion regarding mathematics and its relation to ontology gave way to a more limited conceptualisation, whereby mathematics and logic (in the ordinary sense of these terms) are only applicable to a certain ontological region.¹⁶⁹ At the same time, Heidegger would use etymology to point out the connection between mathematics and learning:

In its formation the word 'mathematical' stems from the Greek *τα μαθήματα*, which means what can be learned and thus, at the same time, what can be taught; *μανθάνειν* means to learn, *μάθησις* the teaching, and this in a twofold sense. First, it means studying and learning; then it means the doctrine taught.¹⁷⁰

Thus, Heidegger was in a position to show that the *mathematical* is not identical with the *numerical*.

¹⁶⁵ Anticipating quite a bit our later discussion in connection to Lacan, it can be noted here that the Heideggerian "event of appropriation" seems to be equivalent to Lacan's conception of the human being's being in the real, and the (forced) choice to let jouissance to be signified. See below, pp. 112–115. Alain Badiou has developed a concept of the *event* as the *praxis* (or procedure) where a *truth* is produced by a *subject* in a *situation* (or opening of being). See for example Badiou, *Being and Event*, pp. xii–xiii.

¹⁶⁶ Roubach, *Being and Number*, p. 1.

¹⁶⁷ Safranski, *Martin Heidegger*, p. 42.

¹⁶⁸ Roubach, *Being and Number*, p. 9. For a detailed discussion see *Being and Number*, pp. 9–45.

¹⁶⁹ See *Being and Number*, p. 125.

¹⁷⁰ Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?* [1935–36], trans. W. B. Barton Jr. and Vera Deutsch (South Bend, Indiana: Gateway Editions, 1967), p. 69.

We are long used to thinking of numbers when we think of the mathematical. The mathematical and numbers are obviously connected. Only the question remains: Is this connection because the mathematical is numerical in character, or on the contrary, is the numerical something mathematical? The second is the case.¹⁷¹

Similarly, Heidegger would turn to etymology to bring again to the surface the connection between logic and *logos* (in Greek: λόγος). “The expression ‘logic’ is an abbreviation of the Greek λογική). To complete it *επιστήμη* must be added: the science that deals with λόγος. ... Accordingly, logic, the science of the λόγος, is the science of thinking.”¹⁷²

In *Heidegger: The Critique of Logic*, Thomas Fay has argued that Heidegger intended to counter “the deformation of truth as revelation ... into propositional truth, and ... the degeneration of λόγος ... into logic” that has accompanied the forgetfulness of *being* in Western philosophy since Plato.¹⁷³ David White has pointed out that Fay’s reading fails to see a limitation in Heidegger’s approach, namely that he “generally refers to logic as if it were a closed and finished system, a seamless whole with little if any internal differentiation ... Heidegger’s writings do not approach logic as the varied and multiform discipline which it in fact is.”¹⁷⁴ Nonetheless, White’s own assessment of Heidegger’s critique of logic is favourable. He concludes that “Heidegger has challenged us to think through the metaphysical presuppositions of logic in light of our ontological nature as historical beings” but admits that “to realize fully the historical and therefore in some sense derivative character of logic is a project that will assume proportions of considerable magnitude.”¹⁷⁵

Rudolph Carnap, a leading exponent of logical positivism, analysed a paragraph of Heidegger’s *What is Metaphysics?*, a text from 1929, and famously dismissed it as metaphysical nonsense. As he said, it was the result of “a logical defect of language” that allowed “the possibility of forming pseudostatements.”¹⁷⁶ Carnap did not limit his comments to Heidegger; he was equally dismissive of Hegel and others:

The metaphysics of Hegel has exactly the same logical character as this modern system of metaphysics. And the same holds for the rest of the metaphysical systems, though the kind of phraseology and therewith the kind of logical errors that occur in them deviate more or less from the kind that occurs in the examples [from Heidegger’s text] we discussed.¹⁷⁷

As Michael Friedman has pointed out, a proper dialogue between Heidegger and Carnap seems to be impossible because the two thinkers have a “fundamental disagreement over the philosophical centrality of logic.”¹⁷⁸ Similarly, Gottfried Gabriel has commented that the opposition between Carnap and Heidegger lay “not so much [in their] attitude toward metaphysics itself, but [in] their views as to

¹⁷¹ *What is a Thing?*, p. 70.

¹⁷² *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* [1928], trans. Michael Heim (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 1.

¹⁷³ Thomas A. Fay, *Heidegger: The Critique of Logic* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1977), p. 6.

¹⁷⁴ David A. White, *Logic and Ontology in Heidegger* (Ohio State University Press, 1985), p. viii.

¹⁷⁵ *Logic and Ontology in Heidegger*, pp. 207, 208.

¹⁷⁶ Rudolf Carnap, ‘The Overcoming of Metaphysics through Logical Analysis of Language’ [1931], trans. Arthur Pap, in Michael Murray (ed.), *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy: Critical Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 23-34, p. 24.

¹⁷⁷ ‘Overcoming of Metaphysics’, pp. 27-28.

¹⁷⁸ Michael Friedman, *A Parting of the Ways: Carnap, Cassirer, and Heidegger* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), p. 25.

what remains for philosophy to do following the end of metaphysics." For Gabriel, it is their "difference concerning the nature of truth" that "drives Carnap and Heidegger in differing directions."¹⁷⁹ In a similar vein, Thomas Fay has written about the non-applicability of Carnap's logical/syntactic analysis to Heidegger's phenomenological descriptions.¹⁸⁰

Interestingly, Heidegger did not ignore Carnap's criticism. His arguments regarding Kantian metaphysics in his *What is a Thing?* apply, according to Roubach, to Carnap as well:

The [Kantian] distinction between analytic judgements and synthetic sentences, the cornerstone of Carnap's philosophy, and of his notorious paper attacking Heidegger, presupposes transcendental logic and therefore ontology as well: it presupposes an ontology that is prior to formal logic. If Carnap has to assume an ontology in order to implement his logical distinctions, what he has to presuppose is nothing less than a pre-logical ontology, where logic is understood in the Carnapian sense.¹⁸¹

According to Greg Shirley, "Heidegger's discussion of logic is connected to his critique of epistemology, which he undertakes in order to begin thinking about *being*." Shirley argues, convincingly, that Heidegger has tried to give "an ontological account of intelligibility that he thinks explains how the derivative intelligibility of any system of logic is possible," concluding "that Heidegger is not the irrationalist many take him to be." As Shirley stresses, "Heidegger's discussions of logic ... constitute a novel, relevant, and considered philosophy of logic, and a unique contribution to the ongoing project of constructing an account of the nature of logic."¹⁸²

Beyond fundamental ontology

Heidegger's approach to the question of *being* was originally conceived as an attempt at fundamental ontology, which began with *Being and Time*. His focus, during this period, was on deconstructing the history of ideas; or, in his own words, to *destroy* the history of ontology. This question was an exploration of Dasein's most basic structure, which he denoted as *being-in-the-world*. Heidegger found himself at the centre of a *circle of understanding* whereby the agents comprising the structure in question, as well as all aspects and facets of the structure, needed to be revealed and considered simultaneously.

Heidegger realised, then, that even though his aim remained unaltered, the traditional terminology of philosophy could not be up to the task. It became clear to him that it was not a question of creating a "new" or "better" fundamental ontology. To talk about ontology as such would be like making it possible to succumb to the same old error in Western philosophy—namely, mistaking the structure of being-in-the-world as a subject/object relationship whereby Dasein as a subject studies and discusses the *being* of beings as objects. Heidegger gradually came to understand that the task he had originally set for himself, that of explicating the meaning of *being*, was tantamount to going

¹⁷⁹ Gottfried Gabriel, 'Carnap's "Elimination of Metaphysics Through Logical Analysis of Language". A Retrospective Consideration of the Relationship between Continental and Analytic Philosophy', trans. Andrew Inkpin, in Paolo Parrini, Wesley C. Salmon, and Merrilee H. Salmon (eds.), *Logical Empiricism: Historical & Contemporary Perspectives* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003), 30-42, p. 31.

¹⁸⁰ See Fay, *Critique of Logic*, pp. 41-43.

¹⁸¹ Roubach, *Being and Number*, pp. 110-111.

¹⁸² Greg Shirley, *Heidegger and Logic: The Place of Lógos in Being and Time* (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 3, 7, 8, 154.

beyond fundamental ontology. He abandoned the project of *Being and Time* and, during what has been called the *turn* (In German: *Kehre*), abandoned some of his earlier concepts and introduced others.¹⁸³

There is a significant debate regarding Heidegger's turn, its radicality, and its import.¹⁸⁴ In my view, most of the basic questions integral to Heidegger's thinking remained as present and pressing as ever for him, both before and after this "turn". In his *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, William Richardson had suggested designating the pre-turn Heidegger as "Heidegger I", and the one after the turn as "Heidegger II".¹⁸⁵ As Heidegger himself put it "only by way of what Heidegger I has thought does one gain access to what is to-be-thought by Heidegger II. But Heidegger I becomes possible only if it is contained in Heidegger II."¹⁸⁶

"Heidegger II" ceased conceiving of the question of *being* as a question of an ahistorical fundamental ontology and saw it as a question of world disclosure, historicity, and language.¹⁸⁷ Groping his way into the question of *being* allowed him to recognise it as a question about the ways in which *being* is historical and about the world epochs revealed by it. This, in turn, opened a way for him to focus more clearly on the specifics of the modern epoch, the epoch of science and technology.¹⁸⁸

This new epoch had begun with Descartes, who had conceived of the human being as an agent of knowledge, striving to find absolute certainty from a starting point of absolute doubt. This was the locus of Descartes's cogito, which Heidegger had targeted in *Being and Time*. There, he spoke about the phenomenological destruction of the "cogito sum" which was supposed to be completed in Part 2, Division 2 of *Being and Time*.¹⁸⁹ He did not complete it.

Instead, Heidegger turned his attention to the specifics of the new epoch. The modern, scientific worldview is obscuring crucial aspects of Dasein's engagement with the world. Modern man seems to be uninterested in realising his or her authenticity, losing focus on what is his or her own (in the Heideggerian understanding). In the time of modernity, Dasein seems to be increasingly under the sway of the *they*. Dasein's comportment towards other human beings becomes increasingly similar to Dasein's comportment towards things: human beings become equivalent to mere objects (present-at-hand) or tools (ready-to-hand).

¹⁸³ For a discussion see François Raffoöl, 'The Incompletion of *Being and Time* and the Question of Subjectivity' in Lee Braver (ed.), *Division III of Heidegger's Being and Time* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), 239-258.

¹⁸⁴ On Heidegger's "turn" and the changes it implies see Joan Stambauch, 'The Turn' in Babette E. Babich (ed.), *From Phenomenology to Thought, Errancy, and Desire: Essays in Honor of William J. Richardson, S.J.* (Phenomenologica, 133; Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), 209-212.

¹⁸⁵ Richardson, *Through Phenomenology to Thought*, p. 624. For a discussion of the two "versions" of Heidegger see Parvis Emad, "'Heidegger 1,'" "Heidegger II," and Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)' in Babette E. Babich (ed.), *From Phenomenology to Thought, Errancy, and Desire: Essays in Honor of William J. Richardson, S.J.* (Phenomenologica, 133; Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995), 129-146. See also Richardson's own later thoughts in William J. Richardson, 'From Phenomenology Through Thought to a *Festschrift*' *Heidegger Studies*, 13 (1997), 17-28.

¹⁸⁶ Heidegger, 'Preface (Letter to W. Richardson)', p. xxii.

¹⁸⁷ This did not prevent him, however, from using the term *Fundamental Ontology* during his *Zollikon Seminars*. See below, p. 45.

¹⁸⁸ For all this see Sheehan, *Making Sense*, pp. 210-211.

¹⁸⁹ See Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 123/89. See also below, p. 59.

Heidegger's critique of technology, science, and the modern, mechanistic, world could be seen as a logical outcome of his attempt at elucidating the meaning of *being*. By tracing truth to the ancient Greek *a-letheia* and *being* to *logos*, Heidegger had become more and more concerned with the forgetfulness of *being*. It was no longer an observation, or a difficulty in the path of understanding, as he has it in *Being and Time*; it was not even just a question of identifying something that the ancients saw but the moderns have lost—i.e., an ontic manifestation of the historicity of *being*. It became a matter of great moral urgency, revealing a kind of *nostalgia*, as Jacques Derrida has put it—a “myth of a purely maternal or paternal language, a lost country of thought.”¹⁹⁰

So, for Heidegger, *Dasein* has a duty towards *being*, a task, which he calls *Task of Thinking*. The task is to strive against its forgetfulness, exemplified, in Heidegger's view, in the advent of modern technology, science, cybernetics etc. It is, in other words, to bring the question of *being* to the forefront. As such it's an urgent task:

Does the name for the task of thinking then read instead of *Being and Time: Opening and Presence*? But where does the opening come from and how is it given? ... The task of thinking would then be the surrender of previous thinking to the determination of the matter of thinking.¹⁹¹

In this sense, one can see the whole philosophical trajectory of Heidegger as a trajectory towards disappointment and moral despair. In his understanding, adopting the modern worldview involved discarding fundamental aspects of *Dasein*'s comportment towards *being*. Heidegger made it his task to bring this question back to the fore—to proceed as a moral, or, rather, as a *deontic* philosopher. Indeed, Heidegger gradually revealed himself as a thinker who was more attentive to deontic questions pertaining to authenticity, deficient understanding of *being*, and deficient modes of comportment towards the world. In a way, Heidegger's later thinking can be seen as ontological but with an eye to the ontic. He was increasingly concerned about the malaises of modernity, but he no longer thought that philosophy alone was enough to counteract what he saw as decline. In his posthumously published interview with *Der Spiegel*, he was clear:

Philosophy will be unable to effect any immediate change in the current state of the world. This is true not only of philosophy but of all purely human reflection and endeavour. Only a god can save us. The only possibility available to us is that by thinking and poetizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god, or for the absence of a god in [our] decline, insofar as in view of the absent god we are in a state of decline.¹⁹²

It might not be so easy for us to decide how to interpret Heidegger's position vis-à-vis this “state of decline.” Dominique Janicaud has commented that

the essential difference that seems to characterise the thinking of ‘Heidegger II’ is that this thinking slides toward apolitics by undergoing a seemingly negligible displacement, not by default, but by clear design.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Jacques Derrida, ‘Différance’ [1968], trans. Alan Bass, *Margins of Philosophy* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1982), 1-27, p. 27.

¹⁹¹ Heidegger, ‘End of Philosophy’, p. 73.

¹⁹² “‘Only a God Can Save Us’: The Spiegel Interview’ [1976 (1966)], trans. William J. Richardson, in Thomas Sheehan (ed.), *Heidegger: The Man and the Thinker* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 45-67, p. 57. In a translator's footnote, W. Richardson comments at this point that “In all probability, Heidegger is not using the word ‘god’ here in any personal sense, but in the sense that he gives to the word (often in the expression, ‘god or the gods’) in his interpretations of Hölderlin, i.e., as the concrete manifestation of Being as ‘the Holy’.” ‘Spiegel Interview’, p. 67n27. On this see “earth, world, gods, man” in Inwood, *A Heidegger Dictionary*, pp. 50-52.

¹⁹³ Dominique Janicaud, *The Shadow of That Thought*, trans. Michael Gendre (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996), p. 67.

This explicitly 'apolitical' attitude, which has nothing to do with a regular indifference toward politics or with the 'apolitical' stance of *Being and Time*, is based upon a re-interpretation of the world situation as a function of his reading of the history of metaphysics.¹⁹⁴

Janicaud has proposed the name "destinal historicalism" for this thinking that sees "metaphysics conceived as the history of *being*,"¹⁹⁵ and as Krell argues, after the publication of the *Black Notebooks*, it became blindingly obvious that, in Heidegger's case, this destinal historicalism corresponded to his

conviction that Germany was destined to play a privileged role in rescuing Greek antiquity for the future of the Western world. And, to the extent that such 'destinalism' inheres in Heidegger's thinking ... of the 'history of being' in general, an enormous shadow is cast over that thinking.¹⁹⁶

It is up to his readers, Krell writes, "to magnify what is thought provoking in [Heidegger's thinking] even as they decry its failings."¹⁹⁷

What is important for me, as a reader of Heidegger and practitioner of psychoanalysis, is to focus now, on Heidegger's growing concern about the uncritical acceptance of what he called modern technological thinking and worldview, and his critique of science. Having followed, in this chapter, his strategy in approaching the question of *being* and shown how, for him, a world is opened up by language and shared, I have clarified his position regarding the historicity of Dasein's concerned comportment towards beings. I expounded Heidegger's conceptualisation of truth as unconcealment, rather than correspondence as traditional metaphysics has it and his rejection of the naïve Cartesian view of the human being as a subject vis-à-vis the objects he or she studies. As I will argue, this critique is of the utmost importance for psychoanalysis if psychoanalysis is aiming at establishing a philosophically robust foundation capable of providing justification for both its theoretical formulations and its clinical practice.



¹⁹⁴ *The Shadow of That Thought*, p. 68.

¹⁹⁵ *The Shadow of That Thought*, p. 69.

¹⁹⁶ Krell, *Ecstasy, Catastrophe*, p. 190.

¹⁹⁷ *Ecstasy, Catastrophe*, p. 191.

Chapter 2: A critique of science and psychoanalysis

In 1947, Medard Boss, a Swiss psychiatrist, wrote to Heidegger asking “for help in reflective thinking.”¹ Boss had come to Heidegger via *Being and Time*. He felt that Heidegger’s thought could offer new insights for the understanding and treatment of human psychological suffering and mental illness. Boss was certain that Heidegger—though not a medical doctor—had something to say about the shortcomings of the so-called scientific approach of modern medical sciences. This letter became the occasion for a collaboration and a long-lasting friendship.

In 1959, Boss started holding Heidegger seminars at his home in Zollikon, Switzerland. Two to three times every semester, Boss would invite 50 to 70 doctors, psychiatrists, and psychologists who would come to hear Heidegger over the course of a few days. Heidegger had hoped, Boss informs us, that “his thinking would escape the philosopher’s study and become of benefit to wider circles, in particular to a large number of suffering human beings.”² The seminars continued for a good 10 years, until Heidegger’s physical powers started declining because of his age. In the beginning, there was no systematic note-taking; after 1963, that task was undertaken by Boss himself. He would record and transcribe Heidegger’s words and send the texts to him for proofreading and corrections. Then they would be distributed to the next seminar’s participants. All the seminars’ protocols, together with parts of conversations between Heidegger and Boss, as well as fragments of their correspondence, have been published in book form, under the title *Zollikon Seminars*, forming the most comprehensive, yet at times fragmentary, collection of Heidegger’s thoughts about psychiatry, psychology, and, especially, psychoanalysis.³

The scientific background of the participants in the seminars was not very helpful in allowing them to understand Heidegger’s questioning and thinking, or even to see its relevance to their work. Boss compared the whole setting with one where a man from Mars visits a group of Earth-dwellers and attempts to communicate. Still, he wrote,

the strangest thing about the Zollikon Seminars was that neither Heidegger nor the seminar participants grew tired of them. From the beginning and over the years, the teacher and students worked persistently toward achieving a common ground.⁴

¹ Medard Boss, ‘Preface to the First German Edition of Martin Heidegger’s *Zollikon Seminars*’ [1987], trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay, in Medard Boss (ed.), *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols, Conversations, Letters* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001), xv-xxi/vii-xv, p. xvi/ix.

² ‘Martin Heidegger’s *Zollikon Seminars*’ [1977], trans. Brian Kenny, in Keith Hoeller (ed.), *Heidegger & Psychology* (Seattle: Review of Existential Psychology & Psychiatry, 1988), 7-20, p. 7.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols, Conversations, Letters*, ed. Medard Boss, trans. Franz Mayr and Richard Askay (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2001).

⁴ Boss, ‘Preface’, p. xix/xiii.

It seemed as if Heidegger undertook this task as a kind of duty, a duty to transmit some of his insights to people who should most greatly benefit from it. Of course, he did not set up to teach medical doctors about medicine, or psychologists about psychology. He only wanted to make manifest all the assumptions that science—be it medicine, psychology, or psychiatry—tacitly makes, and to indicate where those assumptions fall short of the task at hand.

Science and scientific method

Science and the scientific method were at the centre of Heidegger's questioning throughout the Zollikon Seminars. Many scholars do not think that Heidegger had a specific philosophy of science as such. William Richardson, for example, believed that Heidegger, being an important philosopher, could not afford "to ignore the problems of science," and that his "critique of the sciences is inseparable from, because unintelligible without, his interpretation of the fundamental nature of modern times as such."⁵ For Richardson, "What Heidegger offers is not a philosophy of science but a humanism for a scientific age."⁶

In her *Heidegger's Philosophy of Science*, Trish Glazebrook has argued that "the question of natural science is a constant and continuous support against which Heidegger's thinking develops and grows." She claims that philosophy was a "rigorous science" for Heidegger, and has suggested a "radically novel" interpretation of Heidegger, "according to his philosophy of science."⁷

The sciences aspire to an objectivity supposedly guaranteed by their reliance on facts, measurements, formulas, and theoretical models. At the heart of what the sciences claim to do lies the assumption that things are measurable, and that there is a correspondence between scientific models and theories and reality (presumed to be measurable). Practitioners of science take this correspondence for granted and fail to recognise that their assumptions and methods entail already a tacit, unexamined, understanding both of their subject matter as well as of ways to approach it. They implicitly tend to take for granted that modern science is somehow *better* than other approaches. That is the major issue with science, according to Heidegger. As Harold Alderman explains, "science, as Heidegger sees it, does not merely construe its set of propositions as a picture of the world. ... It decides, in a normative fashion, that the world itself consists in nothing other than the picture drawn by science."⁸ The problem, then, is not that science is inadequate for what it studies, but that it fails to acknowledge its limitations, and tends, uncritically, to regard anything not conforming to its "scientific" view with arrogance. In Heidegger's words,

If physicists make judgments about metaphysics, which is quite absurd in itself, then one must demand that physicists first reflect on metaphysical ideas, for instance, this idea about time. Of course, physicists can do this only if they are prepared to go back to the underlying suppositions of physics, and beyond this, to what remains and continues to be

⁵ William J. Richardson, 'Heidegger's Critique of Science' [1968] in Trish Glazebrook (ed.), *Heidegger on Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 27-44, p. 27.

⁶ 'Heidegger's Critique of Science', p. 42.

⁷ Trish Glazebrook, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Science* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), pp. 4, 5.

⁸ Harold Alderman, 'Heidegger's Critique of Science and Technology' in Michael Murray (ed.), *Heidegger and Modern Philosophy: Critical Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 35-50, p. 37.

standard in this domain as *acceptio* [or presupposition], even when the physicist is unaware of it. It is no accident that in a strict sense modern science's self-critique is lacking today.⁹

Speaking about science in the Zollikon Seminars, Heidegger has in mind the so-called “natural” or *hard* sciences. He follows the methodological distinction between natural and human sciences rigorously established by the German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey in his *Introduction to the Human Sciences* of 1883. Dilthey had argued that there is a limit to the kind of theoretical regularities that can be established in human sciences. Psychology, in particular, as a science dealing with human beings, cannot, according to Dilthey, examine them apart from their interactions with society.¹⁰ For Heidegger, medicine in general and psychiatry in particular are sciences that purport to offer the rigour of natural sciences; it is this presumed rigour that remains at the centre of his critique throughout the Zollikon Seminars.

When a human being comes under the scrutiny of a science, it becomes its *object* and can only be studied as an object. For Heidegger, this means that everything that distinguishes a human being qua Dasein from objects that the human being encounters in the world has to be left aside. This of course is not always a problem: there are times when it is perfectly acceptable for a human being to be studied as an object, or, to put it in Heideggerian terms, as an entity *present-at-hand*—for example, when one needs to measure someone's height and weight, in order to calculate their body/mass index.

Quite often, however, this is not the case. The limitation of modern science is that it *cannot* study the human being as anything other than an entity present-at-hand. In this respect, it studies the human being as something that it is not—an object—and in fact it *forces* it to be an object. As Glazebrook explains, for Heidegger all modern science *forces* the beings it studies “to behave in a way they would not when left to themselves: as objects. In this sense, it is violent.”¹¹

With regard to the human being, Heidegger insists, the approach should be different:

In the perspective of the Analytic of Dasein, all conventional, objectifying representations of a capsule-like psyche, subject, person, ego, or consciousness in psychology and psychopathology must be abandoned in favour of an entirely different understanding. This new view of the basic constitution of human existence may be called *Dasein*, or being-in-the-world.¹²

For Heidegger, every science, to the extent that it examines entities of a certain, specific type, has its own ontology. It is in this *regional* ontology that the foundations for each science are to be found. But in Heidegger's view these foundations are themselves founded on a more primordial understanding, an understanding of *being*, or, as Heidegger refers to it in the context of the Zollikon Seminars, a *fundamental ontology*. He explains:

Fundamental ontology is not merely the general ontology for the regional ontologies, a higher sphere, as it were, suspended above (or a kind of basement beneath), against which the regional ontologies are able to shield themselves. *Fundamental ontology* is that thinking which moves within the foundation of each ontology. None of

⁹ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 57.

¹⁰ See Rudolf Makkreel, ‘Wilhelm Dilthey’ *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/dilthey/>, accessed 10 Apr. 2016.

¹¹ Glazebrook, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Science*, p. 107.

¹² Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 4.

these regional ontologies can abandon the foundation, least of all, the regional ontology of psychiatry as a research area, moving within the realm of the unfolding essence of the human being.¹³

This is all the more so for sciences that study the human psyche. What is being studied—i.e., the psyche—is correlated in a most fundamental way with who does the studying: the observers study themselves, so to speak. Still, there is no such a thing as an unmediated access to one's field of study. There are always assumptions that have already been accepted, either explicitly or tacitly. These assumptions—i.e., these regional ontologies—are of major importance but are systematically overlooked.

Clearly, such a critique is directly applicable to psychoanalysis: for Heidegger, Freud failed to question his concepts thoroughly, could not avoid imposing a mechanistic understanding on the phenomena he studied, and accordingly distorted them.

The ancient world: conformity with nature

In our everyday engagement with our world, we human beings create interpretative and explanatory narratives of that world, as well as of our involvement with it. We are *curious* about this world. In Heidegger's view, the term "curiosity" expresses "the tendency towards a peculiar way of letting the world be encountered by us in perception."¹⁴

At different times and in different societies, the demands human beings make on their explanatory systems are dissimilar and depend upon their intended uses. For example, a tribe of hunter-gatherers would need to have some knowledge and understanding of the different fruits and animals around them. They would also need a technology (i.e., appropriate tools) to pick the fruits and hunt the animals. They would need to know what is available, what to do with it, how to do it, when to do it, and what outcome to expect. Similarly, other people belonging, say, in a proto-society of farmers would need to have an understanding of crops, of tending plants, of the weather. At the basis of all engagement with the world there is the same basic assumption—or expectation, or hope: the world is intelligible, i.e., it makes (some) sense. Whether it is the whims of a deity, animal, or the weather, or an understanding of the workings of nature, the underlying assumption is always that things are somehow knowable.

Strictly speaking, the question is not about what is *knowable* as such, but rather about including all encounterable entities in a referential totality where things can make *sense* and be employed in some way, *for-the-sake-of* or *in-order-to* something. As Heidegger writes

The 'for-the-sake-of-which' signifies an 'in-order-to'; this in turn, a 'towards-this'; the latter, an 'in-which' of letting something be involved; and that in turn, the 'with-which' of an involvement. These relationships are bound up with one another as a primordial totality; they are what they are as this signifying in which Dasein gives itself beforehand its Being-in-the-world as something to be understood. The relational totality of this signifying we call '*significance*'. This is what makes up the structure of the world—the structure of that wherein Dasein as such already is.¹⁵

¹³ *Zollikon Seminars*, pp. 190-191.

¹⁴ *Being and Time*, p. 214/170.

¹⁵ *Being and Time*, p. 120/87.

In an early systematisation of what could be called *ancient science* (and worldview), Aristotle understood human knowledge within a rational framework of observations and general principles. As the historian of science John Losee explains, “Aristotle ... maintained that the scientist should induce explanatory principles from the phenomena to be explained, and then deduce statements about the phenomena from premises which include these principles.”¹⁶

According to philosopher of science Alexandre Koyré, the key aspects of the ancient worldview were:

(a) the belief in the existence of specific ‘natures’ and (b) the belief in the existence of a Cosmos, i.e., the belief in the existence of principles of order by virtue of which the totality of real beings form a (naturally) well-ordered whole. ...

Things are not indifferent as to whether they be here or there, but that, on the contrary, everything in the Universe has its proper place in conformity with its nature.¹⁷

It was by referring to this natural order of things that the ancient Greeks explained the observed differences between the earthly and the heavenly world.

As an example, we could take motion. All motion on Earth seemed to be irregular, and always unfolding in such a way that entities were either at rest or striving to return to a point of rest, an “end”. Celestial bodies, on the other hand—e.g., the sun, the stars, the moon—appeared to be moving perpetually in circles. Celestial motion did not seem to have an “end”, in contrast to what appeared to be the case on Earth. In his *History of Philosophy*, Wilhelm Windelband writes that the Pythagoreans interpreted this difference by suggesting that

the harmony prevailing in the motions in the heavenly bodies had, like the harmony in music, its ground in an order, in accordance with which the various spheres of the universe moved about a common centre at intervals fixed by numbers.¹⁸

The Pythagorean antithesis between the earthly and heavenly worlds was taken up by Aristotle in his theory of causality.¹⁹ Aristotle distinguished between four types of causes: *material*, *formal*, *final*, and *efficient*. All were referring to earthly things. Let us, for example, consider a silversmith who has received an order to make a bowl and begins work to make it. According to Aristotle, the *final* cause is the order given to make a bowl; the *formal* cause is the shape an object must have in order to be thought of as a bowl; the *material* cause is what a bowl is supposed to be made of (e.g., silver); and the *efficient* cause is what is needed in order to actually get a bowl when all the other causes are known or given—in other words, the craftsman himself. Applying the concept of the efficient cause to the motion of bodies, Aristotle postulated that if something is moving, it moves because something else is making it move (for example, by pulling or pushing it). In the ancient worldview, any earthly movement will continue to approach its *telos* or end, i.e., its final cause. When it reaches it, movement will stop.²⁰

¹⁶ John Losee, *A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 5.

¹⁷ Alexandre Koyré, *Galileo Studies* [1939], trans. John Mepham (Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1978), p. 5.

¹⁸ Windelband, *History of Philosophy*, p. 45.

¹⁹ See *History of Philosophy*, pp. 148-149.

²⁰ For a discussion of Aristotle’s theory of causation see W. K. C. Guthrie, *Aristotle, an Encounter* (A History of Greek Philosophy, VI; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 223-233. See also Losee, *Philosophy of Science*, p. 11; and Windelband, *History of Philosophy*, pp. 143-

Thus, according to the ancient worldview, everything has its natural place. The earthly world is an imperfect world, and things have not yet reached their *telos*. If not there already, it will make its way, so to speak, to reach it. All transformation and change needs an external cause. In contrast to this, the heavenly world is perfect and eternal. No transformation or change is conceivable there.

The modern world: conformity with law

People no longer think of the world in the same way. In the modern, scientific worldview, there is no difference whatsoever between what is happening here on Earth and what is happening in the sky. Things do not move to reach their “end”, and, in fact, there is no such a thing as an “end” of motion. Motion will continue unaltered for as long as something (a “force”) will cause it to change; this might be a direct force such as gravity or an indirect one such as friction. Crucially, in the modern, scientific worldview, there is no need for an efficient cause or a motive. In nature, things do not happen because someone or something causes or wills them to happen. They just happen.

What this meant, in practical terms, was not easy to grasp. Change is observable, things *do indeed* happen; but if a final cause is not to be postulated, what makes them happen? Thus, as Koyré writes, in Galileo’s studies of the phenomenon of free fall, what he tries to explain or understand

is not the fact of the fall itself; it is not a matter of discovering the *cause* of the bodies’ fall. What is he looking for is the *essence* of the motion of fall. ... The problem is to discover the nature of this kind of motion, its essence, or one might say, its *definition* ... It is this which would constitute ... that fundamental axiom, from which it would then be possible to deduce everything else.²¹

In other words, what Galileo was after was the *law* of free fall.

Conformity with a law is the predominant supposition of modern science: everything happens according to some natural law; the law, or laws, can be formulated; and their effects can be calculated.²² The domain of nature is set up as a domain where points of mass move in space and time. This setup, in turn, is based on the assumption that space and time are uniform. The Galilean universe is that of a homogenous space in which points of mass move and fall in conformity with law.²³

Heidegger stresses that in order to construct his universe, Galileo utilises concepts such as space, motion, time, and causality, which he takes for granted. He is not reflecting further on them, even though they are of crucial importance for his enterprise. Galileo is not positing a hypothesis about space, time, etc.; he is not *supposing* there are time and space: “He accepts without question: space, motion, time, and causality.”

What does it mean to say—I accept something like space? I accept that there is something like space and, even more, that I have a relationship to space and time. This *acceptio* is not arbitrary, but contains necessary relationships to space, time, and causality in which I stand. Otherwise I could not reach for a glass on the table. No one can experiment

145. For Heidegger’s discussion of Aristotelian causation see Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 19. For a more general discussion of Aristotelian physics see Koyré, *Galileo Studies*, pp. 4-8.

²¹ *Galileo Studies*, p. 68.

²² Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 25.

²³ See Losee, *Philosophy of Science*, pp. 47-49.

with these [a priori] assumptions. That there is space is not a proposition of physics. What kind of proposition is it? What does it indicate about the human being that such suppositions are possible for him? It indicates that he finds himself comported to space, time, and causality from the beginning.²⁴

These concepts are, according to Heidegger, “out of the reach for the natural sciences, but, at the same time, they are the very foundation for the very possibility of the natural sciences themselves”.²⁵ Which is to say that Galileo did not reach to conclusions about space, time, or causality by reflecting inductively on the phenomena he studied. He posits them from the beginning.

As Koyré points out, “Galilean epistemology [was] not positivist. It [was] Archimedean.”²⁶ For example, contrary to what is commonly accepted, Galileo did not test his theories of gravity by executing carefully designed experiments, such as dropping objects from the Leaning Tower of Pisa.²⁷ In fact, as Heidegger argues, is only because Galileo wanted nature and its processes to be measurable and calculable that he accepted the homogeneity of space and time.²⁸ Galileo was able to formulate a modern, “scientific” worldview by accepting certain concepts—such as space, time, causality—that *do not* belong in this worldview, in the sense that they were *not* its product, but rather they made it possible.

Modern science’s main supposition is that processes of nature conform with some kind of law. Conformity with a law means that the objects of nature are measurable and that the processes in nature are calculable (and predictable). This supposition, conformity with law, and its corollary—calculability—require that time and space be uniform and calculable themselves. The study of nature becomes the study of the motion of bodies in space. The implicit aim of the modern scientific method is, according to Heidegger, the control of nature.²⁹ However, the fact that the modern, scientific worldview is founded on such an acceptance has been “forgotten”.

The idea that the ancient worldview is radically different from the modern is not exclusive to Heidegger. Koyré, for example, who had been close to Husserl while studying at the University of Göttingen and considered him a “decisive influence on his own approach to the history of philosophy,”³⁰ has written extensively about the passing from what he called the closed world or Cosmos of the ancients to the infinite universe of modern science.³¹

Heidegger identifies the problem of modern science in that it confuses measurability with reality. “That which is calculated in advance and that which is measurable—only *that* is real [for

²⁴ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 28.

²⁵ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 29.

²⁶ Koyré, *Galileo Studies*, p. 68.

²⁷ As A. Martínez reminds us, “in a book of 1935 ... Professor Lane Cooper boldly denounced the story as false: ... Galileo did not drop objects from the tower.” Alberto A. Martínez, *Science Secrets: The Truth about Darwin's Finches, Einstein's Wife and Other Myths* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011), p. 2.

²⁸ See Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 20.

²⁹ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 107.

³⁰ Rockmore, *Heidegger and French Philosophy*, p. 33.

³¹ See Alexandre Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1957); and ‘The Origins of Modern Science: A New Interpretation’ *Diogenes*, 4/16 (1956), 1-22.

science].”³² It follows that non-measurable entities cannot be direct objects of scientific research and cannot be described by a theory. In fact, such entities are either completely dismissed or reduced to one or more of their features as long as the features are measurable themselves. So, for example, since shame or embarrassment are not directly measurable, they cannot be studied scientifically. The redness of a face, however, or the circulation of blood, can.³³ Or, alternatively, one can gauge them indirectly with the help of questionnaires or Likert scales. Heidegger wonders why is it so difficult to recognise “the strangeness of this method regarding the human being, and what constitutes the human being’s *being*.”³⁴

On the givenness of space

Let us return, for a moment, to the question of space and time and reflect on a simple action.³⁵ As I am sitting here, I decide to fetch the glass of water from the table over there. I see the glass, then I stand up, I walk to that table, I stretch my hand, I grasp the glass of water, the freshness of which I can now feel in my hand as I hold it, and then I return to my initial seat. If I consider the whole of this bodily experience, where would I locate my body? This is what Heidegger invites us to wonder. Is my body just an object in space, an object that I happen to inhabit, but which is similar to all the other bodies I may see or encounter? Or is it the case that space is something that I am only able to conceive of because I have a body? How does this work?

I am sitting here. I look around and take in the place I occupy in this room, using my eyes. When I stretch my hand, I can see where it reaches: It reaches away from my body, but not very far away. If I want to reach further, I can move my body a bit; in this way, I am able to extend my hand’s reach. I can also walk. While I was here, I could see the table over there. Now I am walking towards the table. The bodily experience of the place I occupy in this room allows me to reach far beyond the corporeal limits of my body in a very real sense. I am able to see in the clearest way that my body, the embodiment of this Dasein that I myself am, extends beyond the corporeal limits of this same body qua object in a room.

Now let us say that after I reach the desk over there, I stop and look again around me. What do I see? I am standing in a room, next to a desk, and I see, say, a window in the wall opposite me. I can see that I am at a distance from this window. I am at a distance from other objects in the room: I know that because I experience the depth of this room. If I decide to measure the distance between the window and myself, I can do so. What I need to do is simply to count my steps as I walk from here to there. While I am doing that, however, my experience of the room’s depth moves with me. At any given moment, my “here” moves with me as I walk over there. Whatever I do, I am always in a place that is “here” for me. I may be able to measure the distance between myself and any other object in the room, but I cannot measure my very experience of the room’s depth. What was disclosed to me was the experience—namely, that I am at a (measurable) distance from this or that object; and yet the

³² Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 19 (my emphasis).

³³ See *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 81. See also below, pp. 56–58.

³⁴ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 27.

³⁵ For what follows in the next three paragraphs see *Zollikon Seminars*, pp. 85–89. The example is mine.

experience itself is not measurable. As Heidegger puts it, “I [only] measure the distance between two [material] bodies, not the depth opened up in each case by my being-in-the-world”.³⁶

Space is also opened to Dasein via the senses of hearing and touch:

One says that seeing is ‘superior’ to grasping. One can control grasping through seeing because sight, like hearing, is essentially oriented to distance. Yet in a dark room, I can ‘control’ seeing too, through touching. If seeing has a wider range than grasping, then grasping and seeing obviously have something to do with our relationship to space.³⁷

For Dasein, Dasein’s body is not just an object in space; it is radically unlike any other object Dasein can encounter. Dasein *is* spatial but its spatiality does not consist in that it is embodied. Rather it is because Dasein *makes room* in space in its being-in-the-world that Dasein is spatial. In other words, the body of Dasein is in space in an *existential* (i.e., ontological) and not just bodily (i.e., ontic) sense.

In general, the body has this double “role” of being both ontological as well as ontic—in much the same way that the sign (or language in general) is both ontic and ontological.³⁸ Accordingly, space is *not* a framework where Dasein finds its bodiliness but rather something that is disclosed to Dasein through Dasein’s bodiliness. It is the body that discloses space to Dasein, not the other way round. Interestingly, in his discussion of space and the ways it is opened to Dasein, Heidegger does not make any special reference to the sense of smell—or of taste for that matter. Elsewhere he writes that men differ from animals in terms of the discriminatory capacity of their senses, but comments that this does not say anything about the world they inhabit.

For we immediately find ourselves in the greatest perplexity over the question concerning greater or lesser completeness in each case with respect to the accessibility of beings, as soon as we compare the discriminatory capacity of a falcon’s eye with that of the human eye or the canine sense of smell with our own, for example.³⁹

Human beings do not find themselves in an already “open” world which acts as a container of objects, one of which is their own bodily existence. Such a view implicitly presupposes that the spatiality of the world has already been disclosed to human beings. But close examination of the phenomenon of the body shows that this is not the case. A human being—or, better, Dasein—is able to *make room in space* (in German: *Einräumen von Raum*) in its being-in-the-world:

This ‘bodiliness’ hides a whole problematic of its own, though we will not deal with it here.

The *Dasein of the human being* is *spatial* in itself in the sense of *making room* [in space] and in the sense of the *spatialisation of Dasein in its bodily nature*. Dasein is not spatial because it is embodied. But its bodiliness is possible only because Da-sein is spatial in the sense of making room.⁴⁰

For Heidegger, then, the modern scientific view of space as the theatre where natural processes take place is an abstraction, founded upon an originary disclosure of space to Dasein via Dasein’s bodiliness.

³⁶ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 82.

³⁷ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 83.

³⁸ See above, pp. 28-31.

³⁹ Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts*, p. 194.

⁴⁰ *Zollikon Seminars*, pp. 80-81.

What is the origin of this disclosure? Heidegger returned to this question repeatedly. In *Being and Time* he attempted to derive spatiality from temporality, but later he admitted that this attempt was “untenable”,⁴¹ the reason being, as Maria Vilella-Petit comments, that this would open the possibility for an equivalent reciprocal derivation of temporality from spatiality—something that would jeopardise the whole project of *Being and Time*.⁴²

Instead, Heidegger connected the question about the origin of space to building and dwelling, activities that should be understood in terms of Dasein’s *being-in-the-world*: “*Ich bin, du bist* mean: I dwell, you dwell. The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *Buan*, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell.” And later in the same: “Building, by virtue of constructing locales, is a founding and joining of spaces. ... Building is closer to the essence of spaces and to the essential origins of ‘space’ than any geometry and mathematics.”⁴³

On the givenness of time

Heidegger’s criticism of the modern scientific view of time is similar. The conception of time as a linear succession of empty points, each called “now”, is accepted by modern science as the only “objective” conception of time.⁴⁴ As such, it is not challenged by modern (scientific) theories of time such as the one found in Einstein’s Theory of Relativity.

The theory of relativity in physics does not deal with what time is but deals only with how time, in the sense of a now-sequence, can be measured. [It asks] whether there is an absolute measurement of time, or whether all measurement is necessarily relative, that is, conditioned.⁴⁵

Einstein’s conceptualisation of time, as expressed in his theory, had been the subject of a debate between Einstein himself and the philosopher Henri Bergson in 1922. As the historian of science Jimena Canales writes,

Bergson and Einstein accepted that an essential difference existed between psychological and physical conceptions of time, yet they made different deductions from this. For Einstein, this led him to conclude that ‘the time of the philosophers does not exist, there remains only a psychological time that differs from the physicist’s.’ For Bergson this lesson—that psychological and physical assessments of time were different—made, on the contrary, the

⁴¹ ‘Time and Being’, p. 23.

⁴² See Maria Vilella-Petit, ‘Heidegger’s Conception of Space’ in Christopher Macann (ed.), *Critical Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 1996), 134–157, p. 135.

⁴³ Martin Heidegger, ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’ [1951] in David Farrel Krell (ed.), *Basic Writings* (London: Routledge, 1978), 343–363, pp. 349, 360.

⁴⁴ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 50.

⁴⁵ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 57. It is notable that Heidegger is echoing here something that he had written already in 1915, a full 12 years before *Being and Time*: “As a theory in physics, the theory of relativity is concerned with the problem of *measuring time*, not with time itself. The theory of relativity leaves the concept of time untouched and in fact only confirms to a greater extent the character of the concept of time in the natural sciences ... i.e., its homogeneous, quantitatively determinable character.” ‘The Concept of Time in the Science of History’ [1915], trans. Harry S. Taylor, Hans W. Uffemann, and John Van Burren, in John Van Buren (ed.), *Supplements: From the Earliest Essays to Being and Time and Beyond* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 49–60, p. 55.

philosopher's task even more interesting, especially because no one, not even physicists, could avoid the problem of relating time back to human affairs.⁴⁶

Canales points out that Heidegger was dissatisfied with both Einstein's and Bergson's conceptions of time.

His project would differ from Aristotle's, Einstein's and Bergson's in this essential respect. Instead of continuing to debate about *what time is*, which was at the crux of the Einstein-Bergson debate, he proposed to take a step back and ask, what, after all makes time?⁴⁷

Only such an approach would suffice to account for the rich phenomena that are characteristic of time as it is opened to human beings.

Heidegger invited his seminar participants to consider the human experience of time—which he designates as “*world-time*”. As he explains, this refers to the time that makes itself public in the temporalising of temporality: “And we designate it thus not because it is present-at-hand as an entity within-the-world (which it can never be), but because it belongs to the world in the sense which we have interpreted existential-ontologically.”⁴⁸

When one tries to study time phenomenologically—i.e., by letting “that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself”⁴⁹—one sees that far from being a succession of empty “nows”, time (or world-time) has specific characteristics that render it not empty at all.

Its first characteristic can be called *significance*. This refers to the recognition that, for human beings, time is always, and essentially, time *for* something, never an empty vehicle that can be assigned a meaning (or significance) at will.

Its second characteristic is *datability*. Moments of time are datable but this, Heidegger stresses, is not simply to say that they correspond to this or that specific calendar date; rather it means that a specific moment in time, for human beings, is always related to other “moments” in time, never isolated. It may be *before* or *after* such and such, *while* this was happening, *when* that other thing happened, and so on.

The third characteristic of time is its *extendedness*. We may say “now”, but we very rarely—if ever—refer to a temporal point of zero length; any “now” is temporally extended and can occupy any length of time, such, for example, as an evening, a season, a historical period.⁵⁰

Finally, time's fourth characteristic is its *publicness*. As Heidegger puts it:

⁴⁶ Jimena Canales, *The Physicist and the Philosopher: Einstein, Bergson, and the Debate that Changed our Understanding of Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), pp. 47-48.

⁴⁷ *The Physicist and the Philosopher*, p. 143.

⁴⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 467/414.

⁴⁹ *Being and Time*, p. 58/34. See also above, pp. 15-19.

⁵⁰ *Zollikon Seminars*, pp. 42-43, 47.

The datable, significant, and extended 'now' is also never a 'now', merely referring to me. ... It is a 'now' that is immediately commonly accessible to all of us talking here with each other. ... At any given time, the spoken 'now' is immediately received-perceived by everyone present. We call this accessibility of 'now' the *publicness* of 'now'.⁵¹

Having outlined these four characteristics of time, Heidegger moves on to explain that they also apply to when we speak of the past, by saying "at that time" and of the future by saying "then". These are, he says, what we call the three dimensions of time: the past, the future, and the present. But these dimensions

are not simultaneous, as with the dimensions of space, but always only sequential. ... All three dimensions are equiprimordial, for one never occurs without the other. All three are open to us equiprimordially, but they are not open uniformly.⁵²

In this way, time for Dasein is first and foremost temporality. Its characteristics are lost for the scientist who considers the pure now-sequence as the only objective, true time. "What we call datability and significance are regarded as subjective vagueness, if not sentimentalism. [The scientist] says this because time measured physically can be calculated 'objectively' at any time."⁵³

Dasein, body, and sexual difference

Alphonse De Waelhens, a Belgian philosopher who was critical of Heidegger, commented that "in *Being and Time* one does not find thirty lines concerning the problem of perception; one does not find ten concerning that of the body."⁵⁴ When Medard Boss brought this criticism up to Heidegger (attributing it to Sartre) and asked for his opinion. Heidegger's answer was rather restrained: "I can only counter Sartre's reproach by stating that the bodily is the most difficult [to understand] and that I was unable to say more at that time."⁵⁵

De Waelhens was not alone in pointing out this apparent limitation of Heidegger's. Still, the criticism is not quite relevant: In *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body*, Kevin Aho explains that Heidegger's apparent reluctance to talk about the body follows from the fact that he did not intend to write a phenomenological study of the human being in his or her bodily (ontic) existence. "The core motivation of Heidegger's early project is not to offer phenomenological investigations into the concreteness of bodily life. Rather it is to enquire into the meaning of being of Dasein itself."⁵⁶ Similarly, David Cerbone argues that

⁵¹ Zollikon Seminars, p. 48.

⁵² Zollikon Seminars, p. 48.

⁵³ Zollikon Seminars, p. 50.

⁵⁴ De Waelhens Alphonse, 'Philosophy of the Ambiguous (Preface to the Second French Edition)' in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behaviour* (Boston: Beacon Paperback, 1967), xviii-xxviii, p. xix.

⁵⁵ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 231.

⁵⁶ Kevin A. Aho, *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), p. 70.

[an] explicit consideration of the body, or of Dasein's 'bodily nature', may be seen to be at odds with the kind of investigation Heidegger takes himself to be engaged in, namely a transcendental investigation of those features which are distinctive of Dasein's (our) way of being.⁵⁷

There can be no doubt that the problem of the body, and indeed the problem of sexual difference, is of crucial importance for any understanding of what it is to be human, but it is also a matter of priorities. In Cerbone's words, "Heidegger insists on developing his existential analytic of Dasein, and so his account of the world, first: until that's completed, the whole problematic of Dasein's bodily nature must remain hidden."⁵⁸

This is exactly what Jacques Derrida points out in connection to sexuality. Derrida observes that "about what we glibly call sexuality Heidegger has remained silent."⁵⁹ Derrida discusses Heidegger's having been concerned to insist on the neutrality, and indeed the sexual neutrality, of Dasein, and believes that he finds in it the repetition of an old hierarchical division between the sexes.⁶⁰ In connection to this, Cerbone notes that

sexual ... predicates rely for their sense on the 'general structures of Dasein', but not the other way around. That is, one can spell out what it is to be Dasein without reference to sexuality (the body), but one cannot spell out human sexuality (what a human body is) without first explicating what it is to be Dasein.⁶¹

The question of the body is crucial, then, but not in the trivial (ontic) sense of our having a body and recognising that we are dependent on it; it is, rather a question of Dasein's bodiliness. As indicated above, space is, for Heidegger, something which is disclosed to Dasein through its bodiliness. It could be still argued, however, that in its bodiliness, the body is still just an object. In connection with this, Heidegger invites us to consider this simple question: What are the limits of the body? Where does the body stop? "The corporeal thing stops with the skin," he says. But

when we are here, we are always in relation to something else. Therefore, one might say that we are beyond the corporeal limits. ... The bodily limit and the corporeal limit are not quantitatively but rather qualitatively different from each other.⁶²

The differentiation between what is bodily and what is corporeal reflects a differentiation between two senses of the word "body" in the German language, namely the quantifiable "material body" (in German: *Körper*) and on the other the "lived-body" (in German: *Leib*). As Aho explains "the lived body is not a reference to a Cartesian/Newtonian body, not a corporeal mass with measurable attributes" such as weight, mass, shape, location and boundaries.⁶³ Piotr Hoffman writes that this distinction was later taken up by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, who used it in order to explain (and refute)

⁵⁷ David R. Cerbone, 'Heidegger and Dasein's "Bodily Nature": What is the Hidden Problematic?' *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 8/2 (2000), 209-230, p. 212.

⁵⁸ 'Dasein's "Bodily Nature"', p. 225.

⁵⁹ Jacques Derrida, 'Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference' *Research in Phenomenology*, XIII (1983), 65-83, p. 67.

⁶⁰ 'Geschlecht', pp. 69ff., 81.

⁶¹ Cerbone, 'Dasein's "Bodily Nature"', p. 228n15.

⁶² Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 86.

⁶³ Aho, *Heidegger's Neglect*, p. 14. According to K. Aho, this differentiation was first explicitly articulated by Husserl. See *Heidegger's Neglect*, p. 153n13.

the origin of the Cartesian mind-body dualism.⁶⁴ Heidegger was very sceptical about the success of their project: “As for the French authors,” he said, “I am always disturbed by [their] misinterpretation of being-in-the-world; it is conceived either as being present-at-hand or as the intentionality of subjective consciousness.”⁶⁵

Heidegger attempted to speak about the ontic characteristics of Dasein as a factual being, without making the same error. In this sense, Dasein is considered in relation to its (ontological) neutrality—i.e., as neither masculine nor feminine: “The peculiar *neutrality* of the term ‘Dasein’ is essential, because the interpretation of this being must be carried out prior to every factual concretion. This neutrality also indicates that Dasein is neither of the two sexes.”⁶⁶ However, as Aho explains, “the neutrality of Dasein is ‘broken’, insofar as we are each gendered, factual beings.”⁶⁷ Heidegger, too, is quite clear about it: “Neutral Dasein is never what exists; Dasein exists in each case only in its factual concretion.”⁶⁸ This might seem like an inconsistency; it fades, however, when one recognises that we can only talk about a ‘break’ of Dasein’s neutrality insofar as we are already in a world that we recognise and share, and are each trying to make sense of our lives. It is, in other words, something that can only happen subsequently, a secondary rather than a primary moment.⁶⁹

Soma and psyche

The implications of the differentiation between the lived and the corporeal body are even more apparent when we consider phenomena such as pain. When I have a back pain, where is it in terms of spatial location? Of course it is somewhere around my back, but the actual experience of pain does not involve the material, measurable spatiality of the body. One can have a mental image of one’s body, and thus be able to locate spatially a bodily pain, but this picture need not correspond to the material form of one’s body. Heidegger points out that medically trained observers

are educated in anatomy and physiology as doctors, that is, with a focus on the examination of bodies, [and for this reason they] probably look at the states of the body in a different way than the ‘layman’ does. Yet, a layman’s experience is probably closer to the phenomenon of pain as it involves our body lines, even if it can hardly be described with the aid of our usual intuition of space.⁷⁰

And what about the phenomenon of emotional pain? When I feel grief of sorrow “inside myself”, where is this pain located exactly? Is this pain psychical or is it somatic? Does this question make sense at all? If I am to study pain, where should I look? What about sorrow? Is sorrow *real*? How can it be

⁶⁴ See Piotr Hoffman, ‘The Body’ in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (eds.), *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 253-262.

⁶⁵ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 272. See also *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 89. R. Askay points out that even though Heidegger refers to Sartre when he talks about “the French authors”, his criticism also bears out in the case of the second French, Merleau-Ponty. See Richard Askay, ‘Heidegger, the Body, and the French Philosophers’ *Continental Philosophy Review*, 32 (1999), 29-35, pp. 31, 33.

⁶⁶ Heidegger, *Foundations*, p. 136.

⁶⁷ Aho, *Heidegger’s Neglect*, p. 57.

⁶⁸ Heidegger, *Foundations*, p. 137.

⁶⁹ See also Aho, *Heidegger’s Neglect*, p. 57. Cf. Cerbone, ‘Dasein’s “Bodily Nature”’.

⁷⁰ See Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 84.

studied? How can your sadness be measured? What about blushing from shame and embarrassment? Can blushing be measured?

One could say that even though shame or sorrow cannot be directly measured, they can be measured indirectly. For example, if you blush, that means that your face is more red than usual, and this could be quantified by measuring the flow of blood. This is not a satisfactory answer for Heidegger. Throughout the *Zollikon Seminars* he is never tired of repeating that the traditional way of studying non-measurable psychic phenomena by reducing them to something which can be measured is never appropriate. “It is imperative,” he said, “to refrain from any possibility of reductionism.”⁷¹ For Heidegger, attempting to reduce phenomena to something that can be measured is *violent*, an *assault* upon reality, as Glazebrook writes.⁷²

It has to be noted in this connection that Heidegger’s argument against reductionism is only applicable to research conducted according to quantitative methodologies. Indeed, recent decades have seen the emergence of an abundance of qualitative research methodologies that purport to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviour, and the reasons behind them, ensuring that this understanding is firmly grounded on—and reflects—the empirical data collected. They are, however, extraneous to Heidegger’s argument, as it is unfolded throughout the *Zollikon Seminars*, since Heidegger is focusing on the limitations of the natural sciences in particular.

To illustrate his point Heidegger, turns his attention to a relatively new (at the time) field of medicine, that of psychosomatics. Psychosomatics is that branch of medical science that attempts to study illness at the intersection of *soma* or body (in Greek: *σῶμα*) and *psyche* or soul (in Greek: *ψυχή*), focusing on the mutual influences of each on the other.⁷³ Heidegger dedicated more than one seminar meeting to discuss its concepts and overall approach. He brought an example from a lecture given at the first meeting of the Swiss Psychosomatic Association by Robert Hegglin, a Swiss physician and cardiologist. In that lecture, Hegglin had introduced psychosomatics as a concept that covers all mutual influences between *psyche* and *soma* and had suggested holding to one “simple principle” in order to distinguish between the two: “*Psychic phenomena cannot be weighed and measured*, but only felt intuitively, whereas everything somatic can be somehow grasped by numbers.”⁷⁴ Hegglin had brought up the example of sadness, which, as he had explained, cannot be measured, but can be studied indirectly, by investigating quantitatively the process of tear-formation.

This is exactly the kind of approach that Heidegger would take issue with. It is very clear, he pointed out, that if you decide to follow Hegglin’s suggestion, you are not measuring sadness; you are only measuring “a fluid and its drops at the most, but not tears [of sadness]”.⁷⁵ Tears are not tears of sadness in their own right. Tears of sadness can only be seen (and recognised as such) by human beings who know what sadness is. Humans can distinguish between tears caused by sadness and tears caused

⁷¹ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 85.

⁷² See Glazebrook, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Science*, p. 107; and also Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*, p. 100.

⁷³ In the English-speaking world the field is today more commonly known as Behavioural Medicine, and part of its related practice is called Liaison Psychiatry.

⁷⁴ R. Hegglin, quoted in Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 78.

⁷⁵ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 81.

by something else—for example, by an irritation of the eye, or by a strong blast of air. Even if one decided to investigate quantitatively the formation of tears, the equipment one would use to measure their flow would not be in a position to distinguish between tears of sadness, tears of irritation, etc.

For Heidegger, bodily expressions of psychic phenomena cannot be reduced to a set of measurable manifestations of bodily functions, however elaborate.

We usually take [a phenomenon such as] blushing as an expression, that is, we immediately take it as a sign of an internal state of mind. But ... psychologists ... misinterpret everything as an expression of something interior instead of seeing the phenomena of the body in the context of which men are in relationship to each other.⁷⁶

In other words, phenomena pertaining to human behaviour should *not* be interpreted as an expression of a supposed interiority understood as standing vis-à-vis the world: “If one speaks about the ... I–Thou and We relationships, then one says something very incomplete. These phrases still have their origin in a primarily isolated Ego.”⁷⁷ They are conceptual constructions that belong in the modern, scientific worldview and are adopted uncritically.

Heidegger holds that the discussion about the distinction between *psyche* and *soma* cannot but be a philosophical one. Contrary to what appears to be the case, the thematic domains of psyche and soma, or body and soul, are not given in advance. They “are determined by the manner each case can be accessed, and in turn, the way of access is determined by the subject matter, hence, by soma and psyche.”⁷⁸ Any enquiry about the nature of the connections between *psyche* and *soma* is leading us to a dead end if the answer is expected to be on the level of the somatic or the psychological. In much the same way as modern physics, which takes *time* and *space* as suppositions and accepts them without raising questions pertaining to the regional ontology of physics, medical science takes *soma* (body) as a given, without for a moment stopping to contemplate its own regional ontology. From the point of view of medical science, the body is an object present-at-hand, and as such, it (the science) is justified in studying it in its measurability. But this is a very limited view of what the body is.

Certainty, truth, science

For Heidegger, all this is a reflection of the modern outlook that holds that only measurable entities are accessible by science. Two of the conceptual pillars of modern scientific method are the notions of *object* and *objectivity*. These are a relatively recent addition to the history of thought. They belong to the general phenomenon of how something which is present can manifest itself to the human being.

In ancient Greek thought, something which is present was considered to be something that has emerged in itself; the term they used was *physis* (in Greek: *φύσις*), a term derived from a verb that meant *bring forth*, *produce*, etc. After Descartes, things are no longer understood as emerging in themselves; they are now understood as *objects* for a thinking *subject*. As Heidegger explains,

Objectivity is a definite *modification of the presence of things*. A subject thereby understands the presencing of a thing from itself with regard to the representedness. Presence is understood as representedness. ... The fundamental

⁷⁶ Zollikon Seminars, p. 91.

⁷⁷ Zollikon Seminars, p. 111.

⁷⁸ Zollikon Seminars, p. 79.

difference lies in the fact that in the former experience something is a being insofar as I represent it. Modern science rests on *the transformation of the experience of the presence of things into objectivity*.⁷⁹

This change has had major repercussions in our relation to the world. The whole domain of nature was now thought of as a domain of processes—knowledge of which was guaranteed by their measurability, i.e., their calculability. The change of our conception of presence, which took place after (and because of) Descartes, led to a change of what is *truth*. In the past truth was the self-manifestation of what is immediately present; after Descartes it is “characterised as what can be ascertained clearly and evidently, [and is] indubitably certain for a representing Ego”.⁸⁰

Descartes was determined to locate the foundations of certainty in mathematics, because he did not want to rely on the authority of the Bible or the Church. Descartes was searching for “*a single principle of highest and absolute certainty*, from which afterwards, by the method of composition, the whole compass of experience must find its explanation.”⁸¹ Descartes realised that even then, when doubting everything, one can still ascertain the existence of one’s own consciousness, the consciousness of the doubting subject. As Heidegger explains, “that fundamental proof and certainty [is] expressed in the proposition: *Ego cogito sum*, I think I am. In the immediate insight into ‘I think’, that I am is also immediately given.”⁸² Heidegger stresses the point that Descartes’s statement is not a conclusion, and in this he echoes what Descartes writes in his reply to the Second Objections to his Meditations:

And when we become aware that we are thinking beings, this is a primary notion that is not derived by means of any syllogism. When someone says, ‘I am thinking, therefore I am, or exist’, he does not deduce existence from thought by a syllogism, but, recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind. This is clear from the fact that if he were deducing it by means of a syllogism, he would have to have had previous knowledge of the major premise ‘Everything which thinks is, or exists’; yet in fact he learns it from experiencing in his own case that it is impossible that he should think without existing.⁸³

Having established its own existence by the very intuition of its thinking, the human intellect can now turn towards the world—understood as being *out there*, as a domain of objects vis-à-vis the human intellect qua observing subject. The Cartesian subject, just like Descartes himself, seeks for certainty. Certainty needs a solid foundation, and the only truly solid foundation for certainty can be given by science and mathematics. Heidegger notes:

In principle, mathematical things possess the same proof and certainty. This is the reason that the projection of nature as a calculable domain of objects at the same time implies that calculability is understood as mathematical determination. ... In this manner of anticipatory projection of nature as a domain of calculable objects a decision has

⁷⁹ Zollikon Seminars, p. 99.

⁸⁰ Zollikon Seminars, p. 106.

⁸¹ Windelband, *History of Philosophy*, p. 390.

⁸² Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 106. Descartes’ statement is more widely known in the form “*Cogito ergo sum*”, which appears in his 1644 work *Principles of Philosophy*. His original statement was “*Je pense donc je suis*”, and appeared first in part IV of his *Discourse on Method*, published in 1637. Both are rendered as “I am thinking, therefore I exist”. See René Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Writings* [1628-1640], trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 162, 36.

⁸³ Descartes, quoted in Peter Markie, ‘The Cogito and its Importance’ in John Cottingham (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 140-173, p. 146. See also in this connection Windelband, *History of Philosophy*, p. 392.

already been made ... that everything not exhibiting the characteristics of mathematically determinable objectivity is eliminated as being uncertain, that is, untrue and therefore unreal.⁸⁴

For Heidegger, all these considerations should form an important part of the initial elaboration of the concepts employed by any science that would claim to study human beings in their concerned engagements with each other and with the entities they encounter in the world, in their being in time, in their being healthy or ill. And yet they do not. Doctors, psychologists, scientists, and laymen alike “have moved uncritically into the technical-scientific way of thinking and view it as the only one that is valid.”⁸⁵

The similarities between Heidegger’s conception of science and “the work of Kuhn, Feyerabend, Polanyi, Hanson, Hesse and other post-positivist theories of science” are, as John Caputo writes, “suggestive”.⁸⁶ Heidegger uses the term “acceptance” to denote the shared constellation of beliefs within a scientific community—a “paradigm”, in Kuhn’s terminology⁸⁷—and points out that the study of the conditions of this acceptance does not form part of the scientific enterprise: “We stand before phenomena, which require us to become aware of them and to receive-perceive them in an appropriate manner. It is no longer up to the physicist, but only to the philosopher, to say something about what is accepted in this way.”⁸⁸

A critique of psychoanalysis

Heidegger did not have any direct contact with Freud, and it is not precisely known how much he really read him. But he did not respect Freud’s thought. In a speech that he gave in 1947, he made it clear that he saw psychoanalysis as a major threat: “Psychology—which long ago turned into psychoanalysis—is taken ... as a substitute for philosophy (if not for religion)”.⁸⁹

Heidegger was most critical of Freud’s tacit belief in the explainability of psychical life in causal terms: for Heidegger, Freud assumed that the psychical and the physical domain operate in the same way, and wanted to apply the concept of scientific causality to the psychical domain.⁹⁰ Heidegger thought of Freud as claiming that “only what can be explained in terms of psychological, unbroken, causal connections between forces is actual and genuinely actual,”⁹¹ and believed that analysis, in the Freudian sense, is nothing but “a reduction in the sense of a dissolution so that we might develop a

⁸⁴ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, pp. 106-107.

⁸⁵ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 51.

⁸⁶ John D. Caputo, ‘Heidegger’s Philosophy of Science: The Two Essences of Science’ in J. Margolis, M. Krausz, and R.M. Burian (eds.), *Rationality, Relativism and the Human Sciences* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1986), 43-60, p. 43.

⁸⁷ See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd edn., Foundations for the Unity of Science, II; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

⁸⁸ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, pp. 5, 28-29. For a discussion of Kuhn’s theory in connection to Heidegger see also Glazebrook, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Science*, pp. 87-88.

⁸⁹ Heidegger, quoted in Richard Askay and Jensen Farquhar, *Apprehending the Inaccessible: Freudian Psychoanalysis and Existential Phenomenology* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2006), p. 191.

⁹⁰ See Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 20.

⁹¹ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 7.

causal explanation.”⁹² Having observed that there is no such a thing as an unbroken explanatory chain in the *conscious mental life* of an individual, Freud had “to invent” the unconscious in order to establish

an unbroken [chain of] causal connections. The postulate is the complete explanation of psychical life whereby explanation and understanding are identified. This postulate is not derived from the psychical phenomena themselves but is a *postulate* of modern natural science. What for Kant transcends [conscious] perception, for instance the fact that the stone becomes warm *because* the sun is shining, is for Freud ‘the unconscious’.⁹³

In Heidegger’s view, the introduction of hypotheses such as that of an unconscious motivation (to explain, for example, a slip of the tongue or a parapraxis) does not advance the understanding of the phenomenon in question; instead it distorts it because it involves unexamined prior assumptions. “The matter [attributed to] unconscious intention is an explanation as opposed to a phenomenological interpretation. This explanation is a pure hypothesis that in no way advances the understanding of the phenomenon itself.”⁹⁴

We tend to think of remembering as an action of retrieving something and returning it to (our) awareness. And we think of forgetting as a disruption of this action, or a difficulty in completing it. We cannot see that such a description already includes a tacit assumption regarding memory itself, according to which memory is a psychical *container* or *storage*, from which we are supposed to be able to retrieve information at will. This is a very problematic description. In fact, if we look at it closely, we will see that remembering or forgetting is not even the primary phenomenon. Heidegger explains:

The different ways of ‘forgetting’ are the ways and manners of how something withdraws from oneself, how it conceals itself. When I forget the umbrella at the hairdresser, what is that? I did forget *taking* the umbrella *with me*, but not the umbrella. I omitted it. I did not think of it. I was just concerned with something else. Therefore, here forgetting is a privation of having thought of something. Here, memory [is understood as] recalling something.

I have forgotten the name of someone I know. I cannot retrieve his name. It no longer comes to mind. It slipped my memory. The name slipped my memory. What slipped my memory is a privation. From where did it slip? From retaining it, from memory. Therefore, this forgetting is the privation of retaining something. In turn, to retain something is a specific form of the relationship toward which I comport myself. It is not a mode of thinking about something because I do not need to think continuously about a name, which I retain. Here memory is [understood] as retaining.⁹⁵

In other words, if we attend to the phenomenon of forgetting closely enough, we will see that the primordial phenomenon is “retaining”. When I forget something it is because I no longer wish to think about it, and I let it slip away from me; it is not because there is a failure of some sort in a retrieval mechanism or process.

This is an argument that Heidegger had made before. In *Being and Time*, for example, he had written:

Having forgotten as an inauthentic way of having been, is thus related to that thrown *being* which is one’s own; it is the temporal meaning of that being in accordance with which I *am* proximally and for the most part as-having-been. Only on the basis of such forgetting can anything be *retained* by the concerned making-present which awaits; and

⁹² Zollikon Seminars, p. 113.

⁹³ Zollikon Seminars, pp. 207-208.

⁹⁴ Zollikon Seminars, p. 169.

⁹⁵ Zollikon Seminars, p. 168.

what are thus retained are entities encountered within-the-world with a character other than that of Dasein. To such retaining, there corresponds a non-retaining which presents us with a kind of 'forgetting' in a derivative sense. ... *Remembering* is possible only on [the basis] of forgetting, *and not vice versa*; for in the mode of having-forgotten, one's having been 'discloses' primarily the horizon into which a Dasein lost in the 'superficiality' of its object of concern, can bring itself by remembering.⁹⁶

There is a difference between *recalling* (in German: *Erinnerung*) and *making-present* (in German: *Vergegenwärtigung*), a difference that reflects different modes of Dasein's comportment towards beings. If it is difficult to clarify this difference, this would only serve to show us how "in the prevailing physiological-psychological approach, such a phenomenon is presupposed as self-evident and known," while it "not only remains indeterminate, but even more significantly, a decisive state of affairs goes unnoticed".⁹⁷

A phenomenon such as my leaving something behind—e.g., an umbrella at the hairdresser—cannot be explained with the help of, say, a repressed motive, as a psychoanalyst would hold; for Heidegger, the grounds for the assertion are invalid. Even if it were the case that something unpleasant is avoided by means of my forgetting the umbrella, it is rather that I let myself be absorbed with something else in order to be able to let slip away what is uncomfortable for me. I let myself be "entirely absorbed in this avoidance in a nonreflective way." The psychoanalyst tries to *explain* in terms of a set of laws, rules, and models, while the phenomenologist only attempts to *interpret*, i.e., to bring the phenomenon to light. "The matter [attributed to] unconscious intention is an explanation as opposed to a phenomenological interpretation."⁹⁸

According to Heidegger, Freud's overall metapsychology "is the application of Neo-Kantian philosophy to the human being",⁹⁹ whereby the human being is understood in terms of its interactions with an unknown reality. As Richard Askay and Jensen Farquhar explain, Neo-Kantianist philosophical trends

however widely divergent, shared the conviction that something can only be a 'science' if it returned to the spirit of Kant. ... Heidegger ... must have had in mind the Neo-Kantianism of Helmholtz Helmholtz gave a generic, physiological account of sense-perception with empirical analogies to Kant's transcendental psychology. He held that the sensible world is a product of the interaction between the human organism and an unknown reality: the world of experience is determined by this interaction.¹⁰⁰

More specifically, Freud's basic approach "specifically neglects to determine the human being's character of being, [the character] of the human being, who radically articulates his being human with language."¹⁰¹ It is Freud's adherence to a subject-object model of the human being, together with his insistence that the world is presented to the subject's consciousness via object-presentations (i.e., a combination of a *thing*-presentation and a *word*-presentation) that prevented him from seeing that *being* is disclosed to human beings in the clearing—i.e., the openness where *being* is disclosed to Dasein

⁹⁶ *Being and Time*, p. 389/339.

⁹⁷ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 75.

⁹⁸ *Zollikon Seminars*, pp. 170, 169.

⁹⁹ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 207.

¹⁰⁰ Askay and Farquhar, *Apprehending the Inaccessible*, p. 194.

¹⁰¹ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 224.

as truth—even before they have developed a consciousness, that is, even before they have developed an awareness of their reflective comportment towards *being*.¹⁰²

Concealment is not the antithesis of consciousness, but rather concealment belongs to the clearing. Freud simply did not see this clearing; otherwise, he would have succeeded in understanding the consciousness of children. There is a relationship to clearing which need not be ‘conscious’ and reflected on in the Freudian sense. ... Concealment is not a hiding, as is Freud’s ‘repression’, because hiding [as repression] is a special way and manner of being in the clearing.¹⁰³

Freud operated within the mechanistic/scientific (i.e., Cartesian) worldview whereby the human being is to be reduced to an object present-at-hand and can be studied scientifically. Because of this, he failed to give an adequate account of the human being as a world-disclosing being and needed to resort to unnecessary hypotheses, the most problematic of which is that of the “fatal distinction between the conscious and the unconscious.”¹⁰⁴ In short, if Heidegger’s criticism of psychoanalysis is to be taken seriously, what is at stake is first and foremost the concept that is at the very heart of the Freudian project, the unconscious. As William Richardson elaborates,

If the Freudian unconscious is only the underside of a Cartesian conception of consciousness, conceived as an encapsulated ego-subject, what happens if this Cartesian model is scrapped? Does not the unconscious go too? Of course it does—and that is exactly Heidegger’s position. For Dasein is not fundamentally an ego-subject. Dasein is the clearing of *being* in which all beings (including itself) may appear and reveal themselves as what they are.¹⁰⁵

The second axis of Heidegger’s critique of psychoanalysis regards Freud’s failure to grasp the totality of the phenomenon of being-in-the-world, which led to his failure to draw out a complete account of the human being in his or her historicity. “The ‘psychoanalytic case history’ is by no means a history but [an explanation by means of] a naturalistic chain of causes, a chain of cause and effect, and even more, a construct.”¹⁰⁶

Heidegger’s critique focuses on the “orthodox”, Freudian version of psychoanalysis; it is not difficult to see, however, that it is applicable to almost all post-Freudian varieties of psychoanalysis. The challenge is enormous, and cannot be left without a response.



¹⁰² The term *clearing* refers to the openness where *being* is disclosed to Dasein as truth (a-letheia) in an *event* of appropriation. See above, p. 35. For Freud’s discussion of object-presentations see Sigmund Freud, ‘The Unconscious’ [1915e], trans. James Strachey, in Angela Richards (ed.), *On Metapsychology* (Pelican Freud Library, 11; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 159-222, pp. 206-209.

¹⁰³ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, pp. 182-183.

¹⁰⁴ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 254.

¹⁰⁵ William J. Richardson, ‘Heidegger and Psychoanalysis?’ *Naturaleza humana*, 5/1 (2003), 9-38, p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 158.

Chapter 3: Heidegger and the clinic

Even before the commencement of the Zollikon Seminars, Heidegger's ideas were making inroads into discussions about psychology, psychopathology, and psychotherapy. Concepts such as Dasein or being-in-the-world, and ideas such as his on time, temporality, and historicity, were gradually understood as very relevant and connected to the work of those who were trying to study, and alleviate, human suffering.

Speaking more generally, phenomenological influences have been largely fuelling the developments in the field of qualitative research in psychology in recent decades. The overall influence of phenomenology on psychiatry, psychology, and clinical psychology has been very extensive, with several schools of psychotherapy bearing names such as "Existential Therapy", "Humanistic Psychology", and "Person-centred Therapy", to name but a few.¹

Among the many writers who could be mentioned in this connection are, for example, French psychiatrist Eugène Minkowski, who incorporated phenomenology into psychopathology in his study of depression in order to describe and study the lived experience of the human being;² Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, who developed an existential therapy called logotherapy;³ Scottish psychiatrist R. D. Laing, who focused on the study of the experience of psychosis and became associated with the so-called anti-psychiatry movement;⁴ American psychiatrist and psychotherapist Irvin Yalom, whose existential psychotherapy centres on what he calls four "givens" of existence, i.e., death, freedom, isolation and meaninglessness;⁵ Dutch psychotherapist Emmy van Deurzen, whose

¹ See Frederick J. Wertz, 'Phenomenological Currents in Twentieth-Century Psychology' in Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall (eds.), *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2006), 394-411, pp. 404-406.

² A collection of his papers have been published as Eugène Minkowski, *Lived time. Phenomenological and Psychopathological studies*, trans. Nancy Metzel (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1970). It is perhaps interesting to note here that, as B. Burgoyne writes, Lacan referred to Minkowski in his 1932 Doctoral Thesis. See Bernard Burgoyne, 'What Causes Structure to Find a Place in Love?' in Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis (eds.), *Lacan & Science* (London: Karnac, 2002), 231-261, p. 235. Also, M. Marini informs us that in a 1935 paper Lacan criticised Minkowski for having ignored Heidegger. See Marcelle Marini, *Jacques Lacan: The French Context*, trans. Anne Tomiche (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), p. 143.

³ See Viktor E. Frankl, *On the Theory and Therapy of Mental Disorders: an Introduction to Logotherapy and Existential Analysis*, trans. James M. Dubois (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2004).

⁴ See for example Ronald David Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*. (London: Penguin Books, 1973).

⁵ See Irvin Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy* (New York: Basic Books, 1980).

work in the UK focuses on an exploration of the so-called “lived-world” and the human being’s problems in living;⁶ and many others.⁷

Heidegger’s influence has been growing in the field of qualitative research in psychology and nursing as well. One can mention, for example, Sherrill Conroy, who has proposed an interpretative phenomenology—“a qualitative method for research is offered that clearly incorporates Heideggerian philosophy into an interpretive phenomenological research design”;⁸ or others who are discussing “how [Heidegger’s] philosophy may translate into a methodological framework to be utilized in contemporary nursing research.”⁹

There were also some attempts to relate Heidegger’s philosophy to Heinz Kohut’s *Self Psychology* and his “non-Cartesian” conception of the human being.¹⁰ As John Riker has argued,

both Heidegger and Kohut offer visions of human nature that are decidedly anti-Cartesian, for both hold that we are embedded in the world with no possibility of complete transcendence. For Heidegger we are always in-the-world-with-others; for Kohut we develop through self-object relationships and never outgrow our need for them. Subjectivity arises out of intersubjectivity, not vice versa.¹¹

On their part, Robert Stolorow and his collaborators have been working on a so-called intersubjective-systems theory, acknowledging readily the Heideggerian influence on their own post-Cartesian psychoanalysis. According to Stolorow, “Post-Cartesian psychoanalysis and Heidegger’s existential philosophy are both forms of phenomenological enquiry. Post-Cartesian psychoanalysis is an ontic discipline ... Heidegger’s existential analytic, by contrast, is an ontological inquiry.”¹² Stolorow argues that

an encounter with post-Cartesian psychoanalysis has the potential of enriching Heidegger’s existential philosophy, in that post-Cartesian psychoanalysis gives an account of the relational contexts that make it possible for one to dwell in and bear the painful emotional experiences, the ground moods, that are revelatory of authentic existence.¹³

Among the works by the psychiatrists and psychologists who can be said to be more or less directly influenced by Heidegger’s philosophy, Ludwig Binswanger’s *Existential Analysis*, or *Daseinsanalysis* (in German: *Daseinsanalyse*) and Medard Boss’s own *Daseinsanalysis* (in German:

⁶ Emmy Van Deurzen, *Everyday Mysteries: A handbook of Existential Psychotherapy* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁷ A historical overview of the phenomenology’s influence to psychology and psychiatry can be found in Herbert Spiegelberg, *Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry: A Historical Introduction* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972). For a more recent introduction to existential therapies see Mick Cooper, *Existential Therapies* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2003).

⁸ Sherrill A. Conroy, ‘A Pathway for Interpretive Phenomenology’ *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 2:3 (2003); <http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/2_3final/html/conroy.html>, accessed 2 Jun. 2016.

⁹ See Tracy McConnell-Henry, ‘Unpacking Heideggerian Phenomenology’ *Southern Online Journal of Nursing Research* 9:1 (2009); <http://www.resourcenter.net/images/snrs/files/sojnr_articles2/vol09num01art03.html>, accessed 4 Jun. 2016; and also S. Mackey, ‘Phenomenological Nursing Research: Methodological Insights derived from Heidegger’s Interpretive Phenomenology.’ *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 42/2 (2005), 179-186.

¹⁰ For Kohut’s theory see Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: a Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (New York: New York International Universities Press, 1971).

¹¹ John H. Riker, *Why it is Good to be Good: Ethics, Kohut’s Self Psychology and Modern Society* (Lanham, MA: Jason Aronson, 2010), p. 62.

¹² Stolorow, *World, Affectivity, Trauma*, pp. 105-106.

¹³ ‘Heidegger and Post-Cartesian Psychoanalysis’ in François Raffoul and Eric S. Nelson (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Heidegger* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 451-458, p. 457.

Daseinsanalytik), stand apart. Interestingly, for reasons related more to timing rather than to their respective merits, Binswanger is much more widely known than Boss in the Anglo-Saxon world and America. For a long time, psychologists came into contact with Heideggerian thought primarily, or even solely, through Binswanger. It was believed that the differences between Binswanger and Boss were minimal, even though this was not the case.¹⁴

Both authors were very open in acknowledging their debt to Heidegger, as the names of their respective theories suggest; and both authors had come to Heidegger from a more or less Freudian starting point. Their respective approaches represented direct and explicit attempts to apply Heideggerian insights to psychiatry and psychotherapy, and as Hans Cohn puts it, they stand apart as “the most comprehensive and radical attempts made so far to provide a philosophical answer and alternative to Freud’s scientific project.”¹⁵ It is from this angle that I will approach them here. I will examine them as comprehensive attempts at creating a clinically useful Heideggerian theory of psychology and psychotherapy.

Binswanger's *Daseinsanalyse*

Ludwig Binswanger was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist born into a family with a tradition in psychiatry going back to his grandfather. Binswanger studied psychiatry and then served his internship under Eugen Bleuler and his assistant, Carl Gustav Jung. Through Jung, Binswanger came into contact with Freud in Vienna. Their first meeting, and subsequent friendship, was of tremendous importance for the young psychiatrist. Freud presented a fundamental challenge to Binswanger, not only for his science, psychiatry, but also for his understanding of man. They remained friends until the end.

Binswanger was deeply influenced by Freud’s theories, which he placed within the larger tradition of an interpretative approach in the human sciences as laid out by Dilthey.¹⁶ He thought, however, that Freud’s theory missed two things: a solid philosophical grounding for its concepts and formulations; and a more comprehensive conception of man. The first of the two was the promise of Husserl’s phenomenology, while the second, Binswanger felt, was provided by Heidegger’s analytic of *Dasein*.

According to Spiegelberg, it appears that Binswanger was originally thinking of adopting the name “phenomenological anthropology” for his theory, but eventually chose the term *Daseinsanalyse*, first suggested by the Swiss psychiatrist Jakob Wyrsch.¹⁷ The term is sometimes rendered in English as *Existential Analysis*.

Binswanger maintained that experience is never meaningless, and strove to get to its meaning. He also refused to accept that there are clearly distinguishable normal and abnormal states of mind,

¹⁴ See John M. Marschall, ‘Heidegger as depicted by Binswanger and Boss’ *Theoretical & Philosophical Psychology*, 9/2 (1989), 37-43, p. 38.

¹⁵ Hans W. Cohn, *Existential Thought and Therapeutic Practice: An Introduction to Existential Psychotherapy* (London: SAGE Publications, 1997), p. 4.

¹⁶ See Susan Lanzoni, ‘An Epistemology of the Clinic: Ludwig Binswanger’s Phenomenology of the Other’ *Critical Inquiry*, 30/1 (2003), 160-186, p. 167.

¹⁷ Spiegelberg, *Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry*, p. 193.

and rejected any rigid division between psychotic and neurotic disturbances. In his view, any symptom and mental health phenomenon had a meaning in the life history of the specific individual, and his therapeutic approach was to explore and investigate this meaning, never to guess it or to impose it. Binswanger developed his ideas with Heidegger's knowledge and support. Spiegelberg writes that it was Heidegger who kept urging Binswanger to write a "hermeneutics of exploration".¹⁸ Gradually, however, Binswanger started distancing himself from Heidegger and this, at least according to Roger Frie, led to Heidegger's taking "offence" and deciding to work with Medard Boss, who "was not inclined to be critical."¹⁹

Binswanger agreed with Heidegger that the problematic division of the world into subject and object can be overcome only through Heidegger's concept of being-in-the-world; he maintained that this concept could be used to approach and explore mental phenomena such as the psychoses. As he explained,

In the mental diseases we face modifications of the fundamental or essential structure and of the structural links of being in the world as transcendence. It is one of the tasks of psychiatry to investigate and establish these variations in a scientifically exact way.²⁰

In order to describe human beings in their worldly existence and suffering, Binswanger utilised more Heideggerian concepts such as care, thrownness, anxiety, etc. He felt, however, that Heidegger's approach was not fully adequate for his (Binswanger's) own aims. In his major work, *Grundformen und Erkenntnis menschlichen Daseins*, Binswanger criticised Heidegger for ignoring the social dimension in his analytics.²¹ Binswanger contended, as Frie explains, "that Heidegger's care-structure is unable satisfactorily to explain authentic human existence in terms of relation, because the realization of authentic *being* results in the individualization of Dasein."²² Thus, Binswanger suggested a combination of Heidegger's views with elements of Martin Buber's philosophy of the so-called "basic experience", namely the dialogue between *I* and *Thou*, and attempted to supplement Heidegger's concept of *care* with a phenomenology of *love*.²³ In the words of Emmy van Deurzen,

Binswanger considers mutuality or being-with to be fundamental to human existence. Instead of having to choose between Heidegger's inauthentic being with other or authentic being alone, we can redeem ourselves and others through true encounter in Buberian style. This encounter, which is a loving mode of being, is what the therapist should aim for with the patient.²⁴

¹⁸ *Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry*, p. 215n18.

¹⁹ Roger Frie, 'Language and Subjectivity: from Binswanger through Lacan' in Roger Frie (ed.), *Understanding Experience: Psychotherapy and Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2003), 137-160, p. 149.

²⁰ Ludwig Binswanger, 'The Existential Analysis School of Thought' [1945], trans. Ernest Angel, in Rollo May, Ernest Angel, and Henri F. Ellenberger (eds.), *Existence* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1958), 191-213, p. 194.

²¹ *Grundformen und Erkenntnis menschlichen Daseins* [1942] (4th edn.; München: Ernst Reinhardt Verlag, 1964).

²² Roger Frie, *Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity in Modern Philosophy and Psychoanalysis: A Study of Sartre, Binswanger, Lacan, and Habermas* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), p. 80.

²³ See Martin Buber, *I and Thou* [1923], trans. Walter Kaufmann (London: Continuum, 2008). See also Spiegelberg, *Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry*, pp. 204-208, 231.

²⁴ Van Deurzen, *Handbook*, p. 197.

From a strictly Heideggerian point of view, Binswanger's *Daseinsanalyse* is based on a fundamental misunderstanding. Heidegger never set out to create a theory of anthropology: his *Analytic of Dasein* was meant to be *prior* to anthropology, as well as prior to psychology or biology. Dasein is an ontological concept, not an ontic one; when Heidegger uses the term "Dasein", he does not employ it as a synonym for the term "human being". Binswanger seems to confound the ontological scope of Heidegger's concept with the ontic scope of his own approach.

Still, this misunderstanding might not be so unexpected, as Frie argues. Frie draws attention to the fact that in early Heidegger the distinction between ontological and ontic concepts might not always have been so clear-cut and obvious:

Dasein itself can at the same time be considered to be factually a human being. From this perspective, it is not entirely surprising that Heidegger's ontological investigation was seen by Binswanger and other early commentators to provide a productive model for anthropological studies of the human being.²⁵

I do not find Frie's explanation entirely satisfactory. As already discussed, the ontological scope of Heidegger's project had been very clear throughout his writings—the only thing slightly changing between the early and the later Heidegger being his terminology and main focus. In my view, Binswanger has missed the point.

There is a similar misconstruction involved in Binswanger's take on concepts like *care*. For Heidegger, care is an empty formula, ontologically prior to any "factual 'attitude' and 'position' of Dasein, ... it is always already in them."²⁶ Care is not one of the (ontic) ways in which Dasein relates to the beings it encounters. Care, in Heidegger's ontological sense, encompasses all ontic terms representing each and every way in which Dasein is involved with the entities of this world, for example (ontic) *care* (e.g., "I care for my children"), (ontic) *love* (e.g., "I love my job") or other terms such as *hate*, *contempt*, *dislike*. Binswanger, however, does not seem to see this. As Heidegger himself put it during his Zollikon Seminars,

Binswanger's misunderstanding consists not so much of the fact that he wants to supplement 'care' with love, but that he does not see that *care* has an existential, that is, *ontological* sense. Therefore the analytic of Dasein asks for Dasein's basic *ontological (existential)* constitution and does not wish to give a mere description of the ontic phenomena of Dasein.²⁷

For Heidegger the relation of Dasein to being "is not a determination which only concerns the theme of fundamental ontology, but ... *the* fundamental characteristic of Dasein as such."²⁸

Binswanger became aware of this misunderstanding, as he admitted in the preface to the fourth edition of his *Grundformen*, but he called it fruitful, and pointed out that his own focus was not fundamental ontology as such.²⁹ In connection to this, Bradley Seidman writes:

²⁵ Frie, *Subjectivity and Intersubjectivity*, p. 85.

²⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time* (J. Stambaugh trans.), p. 180/193.

²⁷ Zollikon Seminars, p. 116.

²⁸ Zollikon Seminars, pp. 189-190.

²⁹ See Binswanger, *Grundformen*, p. 12.

Perhaps it is more accurate to look upon Binswanger's fruitful misunderstanding of Heidegger as a separate, independent, construct of man which rescues psychoanalysis from the one-sided, naturalistic distortion of the image of man. ... Binswanger's philosophical and psychiatric undertaking must be judged from the viewpoint of his professional goal. If his intention was to interpret Heidegger, then putting into Heidegger's mouth what Buber has said is a misunderstanding. But if we look upon Binswanger as focusing on the insufficient manner of Heidegger's Being-with, and then complementing this with Buber's I-Thou dialogue, then there is no fault with Binswanger's endeavour.³⁰

In characterising Heidegger's being-with as insufficient, Seidman here follows Sartre's argument, namely that Heidegger fails to clarify how it is possible to "pass" from an ontological to an ontic inference. Sartre's criticism was discussed in Chapter 1, and found not convincing.³¹ In the same way, Seidman's attempt to justify Binswanger's thinking from a philosophical (Sartrean) point of view is not convincing either.

Binswanger questioned the grounding of Freud's metapsychology from a philosophical point of view and attempted to complement it with insights from Heidegger's philosophy. From the vantage point of some decades later, however, Binswanger's Daseinsanalyse appears as an honest but limited, and perhaps a bit naïve attempt. Its import today is narrow.

Boss's Daseinsanalytik

Medard Boss was a Swiss psychiatrist, with a trajectory similar to Binswanger's.³² He, too, had begun by studying Freud's theories. Based in Zurich, Boss became connected to Jung's circle, and for a period of time he even practiced Jungian analysis. He became disillusioned, however, with Jung's own theoretical formulations as well, which, Boss felt, were unsupported in Jung's clinical praxis. This led him to Binswanger, with whom he shared a common background and training. It was Binswanger who first drew Boss's attention to Heidegger.

After a period of struggling with *Being and Time* during the war, Boss decided to contact the philosopher himself, having felt that Heidegger's approach offered new insights for the understanding of man. Boss developed his own version of a theory and practice of "psychology" which would utilise Heidegger's unique insights and terminology. He called it *Daseinsanalytik* (rendered into English as Daseinsanalysis) to underline its Heideggerian connection.

Boss was not a philosopher. He was a psychiatrist interested in human suffering and mental illness. He agreed with Heidegger that philosophy is of the utmost importance to psychoanalysis if psychoanalysis is to be grounded solidly at all, and adopted the same phenomenological approach.³³ Like Heidegger and, before him, Husserl and Brentano, Boss believed that in order to study psychical phenomena we need to go to the phenomena themselves. He laid great stress on the "need to be able

³⁰ Bradley Seidman, *Absent at the Creation: The Existential Psychiatry of Ludwig Binswanger* (New York: Libra Publishers, 1983), pp. 42-43.

³¹ See above, p. 31.

³² For what follows in this paragraph see Spiegelberg, *Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry*, pp. 334-336, and Erik Craig, 'Remembering Medard Boss' *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 21/3 (1993), 258-276.

³³ See Medard Boss, *Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis*, trans. Ludwig B. Lefebvre (New York: Basic Books, 1963), p. 28.

to abstain from forcing man into any preconceived and prejudicial category beforehand, such as ‘soul’, ‘psyche’, ‘person’ or ‘consciousness’.”³⁴

Boss greatly respected Freud. He felt that Freud’s method, psychoanalysis, was in itself evidence that Freud’s work had certain *Daseinsanalytik* qualities. The basic psychoanalytic “tools”—such as free association, opaqueness of the analyst, the analyst’s free-flowing attention, the attempt to reconstruct a patient’s history, the search for the meaning hidden in the manifestations of one’s psychic life—were tools that were giving Freud “an immediate and primary understanding of man.”³⁵ What Boss took issue with were Freud’s theoretical constructions.

Boss described *Daseinsanalysis* as beginning with the “simplest, immediately given and indisputable phenomenon—the primary awareness of Being-ness.” He argued that “man’s primordial being-in-the-world is not an abstraction but always a concrete occurrence.” For Boss, this immediate and primary awareness of “Being-ness as such” is the very essence of man’s existence. This ontological structure of being-in-the-world as the primary awareness of Being-ness is not something existing in some “superworld”, nor is it like a Platonic idea or a Kantian a priori; instead, Boss argues, it is manifesting itself only now and here in, or as, man’s existence. This is an important point for Boss, because in this way he avoids Sartre’s argument about the impossibility of passing from the ontological to the ontic. For Boss, the ontological is readily observed in the actual phenomena of life.

Regarding language, Boss argues that “in its deepest meaning [it] has to be regarded as a primordial existentialium of human *Dasein*.”³⁶ Through language the world is disclosed to *Dasein*. In fact, *Dasein* as such has to be regarded as the clearing in which the world is disclosed. *Dasein* is essentially world-disclosure. *Dasein*’s original spatiality is grounded on this fact, and is closely related to man’s original temporality, which in turn always refers to his own *Dasein*’s disclosing and taking care of something.³⁷

Criticism of the Freudian “unconscious” was central to Boss’s writings. He claimed that nothing can justify its introduction—certainly not the phenomena of mental life that led Freud to it, such as dreams, parapraxes, etc. For Boss, it was only because Freud thought of “ideas” as internal (or mental) representations of objects or other entities of an external world that he deemed it necessary to bring in the assumption of the existence of an unconscious. Otherwise, he would not be able to explain the observable fact of, say, one’s temporarily forgetting a well-known piece of information. For Freud, this piece of information, this “idea”, could not but have been made temporarily inaccessible (namely, pushed into the “unconscious”) by a mental force such as “repression”. Obviously, if there *was* such a force at play, and yet we are unaware of it, this can only mean that it must be located in the unconscious as well. At the heart of all this is the underlying belief in a state of affairs in which a human being is something analogous to a camera, an entity (subject) that collects and processes representations of the world *out there*.³⁸ Not so for Boss: a thought is not seen as the internal presence

³⁴ *Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis*, p. 32.

³⁵ *Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis*, p. 78.

³⁶ *Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis*, p. 40.

³⁷ See *Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis*, pp. 43-45.

³⁸ See *Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis*, pp. 81, 90-93.

of an idea originating in (or reflecting) an external world, but rather as evidence of the “ec-static” character of Dasein as an “elucidating, meaning-disclosing clearing.”³⁹

In this view, a piece of information that is unexpectedly forgotten is evidence only of one thing: that sometimes the presence of an entity (the piece of information) can fall out of one’s existential realm of openness.

Forgetting is not a separate mental ability, any more than remembering or retaining. It is an occurrence of our open realm of prescriptive being-in-the-world, one to which we are given over at all times. Like remembering, it concerns the things of my world. It is without exception the names themselves, the persons or objects, which, having revealed themselves from their places in the world-openness as which I am existing, can either be retained or slip away from me. It does not involve the displacement of some assumed endopsychic representations of external world objects.⁴⁰

Boss was also skeptical about Freud’s conception of mental determinism, especially in reference to human psychopathology:

A Daseinsanalytic study of pathogenesis does not aim to trace phenomena back to causes, but is concerned with discovering biographical incidents which then motivated a human being to conduct himself in a certain way and which still motivate him to perpetuate these modes.⁴¹

Writing about mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, Boss makes two points:

First, schizophrenic illness is *not*, current conceptions notwithstanding, a disorder in intrapsychic representations of objects in the outside world, or of inner drives and aspirations, all of which would reside in a capsule-like psyche. ... Second, schizophrenia must be seen as a disturbance of the specific being-in-the-world which is the nature of human being.⁴²

Boss insisted that “schizophrenia will be recognized in its encroachment on the freedom of being-in-the-world when human experience itself is seen as open, responsive, ec-static being-in-the-world.”⁴³ In other words, “human being is nothing but its perceptive opened, and so this characteristic mode of behavior of the schizophrenic—in psychiatry called schizoid behavior or autism—amounts to a radical destruction of human being.”⁴⁴ Regarding the etiology of the illness, Boss pointed out that

whenever the schizophrenic’s ability to respond to the encountered is overextended or claimed more intensively than he can bear, his existential freedom collapses. This explains why it is that schizophrenia is unknown in animals, rare in children, not infrequent in women after childbirth, and most frequent after puberty. In the latter two situations, the individual’s perceiving existence is opened to powerful new demands from others.⁴⁵

Finally, comparing the Daseinsanalytic view of schizophrenia with that of obsessive-compulsive disorder, he wrote:

³⁹ *Psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis*, p. 96.

⁴⁰ *Existential Foundations of Medicine and Psychology*, trans. Stephen Conway and Anne Cleaves (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1994), p. 118.

⁴¹ *Existential Foundations*, p. 192.

⁴² *Existential Foundations*, p. 235.

⁴³ *Existential Foundations*, p. 225.

⁴⁴ *Existential Foundations*, p. 226.

⁴⁵ *Existential Foundations*, p. 235.

The obsessive-compulsive patient is never so completely engulfed in what he has perceived that he must become it and thereby perish as a human being. In schizophrenia the patient loses his freedom and with it his dwelling place in the world to a much higher degree. Obsessive-compulsion may encroach on the patient's freedom, but it does not engender its destruction.⁴⁶

All in all, Boss would recognise that in practice there is much in common between Freud's psychoanalysis and Daseinsanalysis. He argued, however, that

Daseinsanalysis is the only form of psycho-therapy which has a philosophically adequate foundation for understanding the phenomena which appear within that situation as well as the fundamental meaning of psychotherapy itself and how it is even possible in the first place.⁴⁷

From a Heideggerian point of view, there can be little doubt that Boss has been much more successful than Binswanger in applying Heidegger's insights to psychiatry and psychotherapy. Boss remained throughout his writings very close to Heidegger's texts, and did not shy away from using Heidegger's very distinct language, and reproducing in his writings many of Heidegger's own examples—to the point that sometimes is not easy to distinguish between the two. Eric Craig considers Boss's language as one of the reasons why his work has not been more widely embraced, especially in America.⁴⁸

In my view there are two main issues with Boss's Daseinsanalysis. The first is the question of whether it is indeed useful, or even valid, to use concepts such as Dasein within a framework of study of human psychopathology, in the manner of Boss; and the second is related to Daseinsanalysis' effectiveness as a therapeutic tool. Let us begin with the first.

We can accept that a phenomenological description of one's own (ontic) existence on this earth will state something like I *am* this Dasein whose being is always *mine*. Still, this is *not* tantamount to saying that I am *identical* to Dasein as such—Dasein is not synonymous with my being qua human being. For example, when I consider my own personal suffering, this suffering is *ontic*, and *not* ontological. It is not valid to say that it is a suffering of this particular Dasein—in contrast to, say, the Dasein next door who these days does not suffer at all. It would be conceptually more correct to say that I am suffering, qua Dasein, in one of the many ways that Dasein can suffer. The multiplicity or totality of these ways is *ontological*; my own suffering, on the other hand, however typical, complex or multifaceted it may be, is merely ontic. In a similar vein, Dasein's death is ontological, but *my own* unavoidable demise is ontic.

Yet we see Boss as claiming that a Daseinsanalytic therapy would seek to help a schizophrenic patient to achieve “a measure of authentic selfhood and slowly go on to *richer, more free, more mature* possibilities of perceiving and responding to a *freer* being-in-the-world.”⁴⁹ Is it not the case that here Boss is treating an ontological concept, such as being-in-the-world, as if it were an ontic property of Dasein qua human being? Is it not the case that the concept of *richer* or *more free* possibilities of perceiving being-in-the-world is disregarding the ontological difference? A similar problem can be

⁴⁶ *Existential Foundations*, p. 238.

⁴⁷ ‘Recent Considerations in Daseinsanalysis’ *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 16/1 (1988), 58–74, p. 72.

⁴⁸ See Craig, ‘Remembering Medard Boss’, p. 272.

⁴⁹ Boss, *Existential Foundations*, p. 254 (my emphasis).

identified in Boss's reference (in the same example) to *freer* and more *mature* possibilities of perceiving. Is it not the case that Boss allows himself to include his own views on (ontic) mental development (e.g., *mature* as opposed to *immature*, and *free* as opposed to *unfree*) in a discussion that ought to remain ontological?

By arguing that concepts such as being-in-the-world are not abstractions, but always concrete occurrences, Boss fails to keep open Heidegger's own distinction. Heidegger writes: "Being and its structure transcend every being and every possible existent determination of a being. Being is the *transcendens* pure and simple. ... Phenomenological truth (disclosedness of being) is *veritas transcendentalis*."⁵⁰ One can see here that, for Heidegger, Being, being-in-the-world, Dasein, care, etc., are not abstractions but *transcendens pure*. For Boss, however, they are taken as worldly and concrete, i.e., ontic. In other words, it appears as if the ontological difference is being disregarded.⁵¹

This disregard is reflected in Daseinsanalysis in terms of its clarity and internal consistency. Let us take an example. As seen above, Boss describes schizophrenia as an encroachment on the freedom of being-in-the-world, the degree of which may help in differentiating schizophrenia from, say, obsessive-compulsive disorder. He does not, however, seem willing to offer an explanation of how a differing degree of encroachment can account for the radically different (clinical) picture of these two different modes of suffering, leaving the whole issue rather in the dark. It appears as if in the eyes of a Daseinsanalyst, an obsessive-compulsive patient might well become schizophrenic, if for some reason the encroachment is increased. In effect, one seems to be at a loss as regards an understanding of the reasons some people fall ill in *this* rather than *that* way.⁵² By choosing to remain on what he considers to be a phenomenologically appropriate level, Boss fails to produce a clinically relevant theory.

This brings us to the second issue with Daseinsanalysis, which is related to its therapeutic effectiveness. In a paper focused on this subject, Richard Boothby contrasts Boss's overall optimism regarding the expected outcome of a therapy to Freud's overall pessimism and modesty.⁵³ For Boss, a cure can be envisaged in terms of "the patient's realization of previously overlooked possibilities",⁵⁴ and as such it is always possible, provided that a trusting and accepting relationship between patient and analyst is established. Freud, on the other hand, had a radically different view, and did not hide his pessimism regarding the power of analysis as a tool.⁵⁵ According to Boothby, Boss's optimism can be traced back to his rejection of the unconscious. Boothby argues, convincingly, that Boss failed to acknowledge the clinical observations that had led Freud to his theoretical formulations, and failed to

⁵⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time* (J. Stambaugh, trans.), pp. 33-34/38.

⁵¹ See Scott D. Churchill, 'Daseinsanalysis: In Defense of the Ontological Difference' *Theoretical & Philosophical Psychology*, 9/1 (1989), 51-56. Similar objections have also been expressed in passing by Spiegelberg in Spiegelberg, *Phenomenology in Psychology and Psychiatry*, p. 338.

⁵² I am not referring here to the predictive power of Boss's theory, but to its interpretative merits.

⁵³ See Richard Boothby, 'Heideggerian Psychiatry? The Freudian Unconscious in Medard Boss and Jacques Lacan' *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 24/2 (1993), 144-160.

⁵⁴ 'Heideggerian Psychiatry?', p. 150.

⁵⁵ See Sigmund Freud, 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable' [1937c], trans. Alan Bance, *Wild Analysis* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 173-208. For a commentary from a Lacanian point of view on Freud's arguments in this paper see my own 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable: A Summary' *Journal of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research*, 20 (2010), 169-194.

account for them. As an example, Boothby examines Boss's phenomenological descriptions of phenomena which Freud would describe and explain using hypotheses such as that of the unconscious and repression. Boss's descriptions led him to reject the postulate for an unconscious as misplaced and unnecessary. However, as Boothby argues, if we look carefully at what Boss offers in its stead, we will see that he is effectively saying nothing more than that repression occurs; as if repression is, so to speak, nothing but "an unexplained and unexplainable feature of existence."⁵⁶ In all, Boothby's view is that Boss misunderstood Freud's conception of the unconscious, and failed to recognize the complexity of the concept. He chose to attack only its weakest, mechanistic, formulation, offering instead something which "refers less to the *unconscious* than to what Freud called the *preconscious*".⁵⁷

Boss's influence has been and remains significant. He has been, as van Deurzen writes "without a doubt the foremost exponent of existential psychotherapy in its purest Heideggerian form."⁵⁸ Cooper has no doubt that Boss's writings "offer therapists of all persuasions an opportunity to reflect on, and reconsider, some of their most cherished beliefs", even though his "unerring loyalty towards Heidegger ... also gives Daseinsanalysis a somewhat reactionary, stagnant feel".⁵⁹ This "stagnant feel", together with what I consider to be a failure, of Boss's part, to present a clinically compelling psychotherapeutic theory, reveals *Daseinsanalytik* as not much more than an exercise in Heideggerian phenomenology.

Heidegger and psychoanalysis revisited

In the previous chapter, I outlined Heidegger's critique of psychoanalysis. Heidegger's picture of Freudian theory seems to tally with what is known about Freud's influences and background. Indeed, as was previously mentioned, Freud's philosophical standpoint is solidly located in the scientific worldview of the 19th century, and this being so, it would follow that what he sought to accomplish would be a scientific (i.e., a deterministic) description of human mental life and behaviour, as an interaction between the biological organism and the external world. Freudian concepts such as the unconscious, the instincts (or drives), repression, and so on and so forth, provide enough evidence of Freud's intention to formulate a scientific—understood as causal—model of human mental life and behaviour.

According to Henri Ellenberger, Freud's philosophical background was a mixture of positivism, scientism, and atheism. Freud attended lectures by Franz Brentano, who was also the teacher of Husserl and, also according to Ellenberger, had been unmistakably influenced by philosophers like Fechner, von Hartmann, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche.⁶⁰ Heidegger, on his part, would count Freud

⁵⁶ Boothby, 'Heideggerian Psychiatry?', p. 152.

⁵⁷ 'Heideggerian Psychiatry?', p. 150. Boss's philosophical arguments against the unconscious are largely identical to Heidegger's and as such will be discussed below.

⁵⁸ Van Deurzen, *Handbook*, p. 200.

⁵⁹ Cooper, *Existential Therapies*, pp. 49, 48.

⁶⁰ See Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious: The History and Evolution of Dynamic Psychiatry* (Basic Books, 1970), pp. 541-543. For Brentano see above, p. 15; for Brentano's influence on Freud see also p. 105n55.

among the proponents of a type of Neo-Kantianism, which sees the human being in terms of its interactions with a reality that is not known.⁶¹

Freud himself believed that he lacked the talent for philosophy—“by nature,” as he admitted in a 1931 letter—and that he had “made a virtue of necessity” to “convert the facts that revealed themselves” to him in as “undisguised, unprejudiced, and unprepared” a form as possible.⁶² Accordingly, he professed his lack of respect for what he perceived as arrogance on the part of metaphysicians and did not have much time for philosophy.⁶³ Freud was not, however, always so hostile to it. As David Livingstone Smith writes, Freud “was critical of the philosophical orthodoxy of his day ... [but] was alive to many of the philosophical ramifications of his work”.⁶⁴ In this connection, Clark Glymour has commented that

Freud's writings contain a philosophy of mind, and indeed a philosophy of mind that addresses many of the issues about the mental that nowadays concern philosophers and ought to concern psychologists. Freud's thinking about the issues in philosophy of mind is often better than much of what goes on in contemporary philosophy, and it is sometimes as good as the best.⁶⁵

Many writers, including Boss, have emphasised the difference between Freud the scientist and Freud the psychoanalyst. Even if one agrees with Heidegger that Freud's metapsychology is an artificial mechanistic construction that fails to question its presuppositions, one must at least recognise that it was Freud's attention to the phenomena that guided him in his theoretical speculations and not the other way around. Freud did not hesitate to challenge the medical, scientific, and philosophical establishments of his time by introducing concepts that ran contrary to conventional knowledge. For a child of his time, Freud was a very rebellious child indeed.⁶⁶ In addition to this, Freud never shied away from modifying or abandoning hypotheses and concepts if clinical evidence required him to.

Freud's main motivation for developing psychoanalysis was his readiness to recognise that his observations—i.e., his listening to what his patients had to say—did not fit well with received knowledge, and his willingness to challenge tradition. This quest for truth is echoed in Ernest Jones's biography, where he writes, “Freud's passion to get at the truth with the maximum of certainty was, I again suggest, the deepest and strongest motive in his nature and the one that impelled him towards his pioneering achievements.”⁶⁷

⁶¹ See Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 207. See also above, p. 62.

⁶² Freud, quoted in Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for our Time* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 46n.

⁶³ See *Freud: A Life*, p. 119.

⁶⁴ David Livingstone Smith, *Freud's Philosophy of the Unconscious* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), p. 1.

⁶⁵ Clark Glymour, ‘Freud's Androids’ in Jerome Neu (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 44–85, p. 46.

⁶⁶ Ellenberger comments, however, that contrary to the grim picture presented by Freud himself, especially for the early years of his career, there is little evidence of professional isolation, rejection, envy and meanness on the part of Freud's colleagues. See Ellenberger, *Discovery of the Unconscious*, pp. 454–457.

⁶⁷ Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud, Life and Work, Vol. 2: Years of Maturity, 1901–1919* (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), p. 481.

Far from acting like a short-sighted 19th-century scientist, eager to describe human beings in a way that would conform to a tacit mechanistic ontology, Freud developed psychoanalysis as a technique whose point, as it has been argued, was never

to influence the patient in a manipulative way, ... to try to explain his life history in causalities. This was what Heidegger accused psychoanalysis of. On the contrary—it is precisely psychoanalysis that meets the demands made by Heidegger.⁶⁸

Similar points have been made by others who have attempted a re-evaluation of basic Freudian conceptions from a non-mechanistic point of view, and have argued about the hermeneutic dimension of Freudian psychoanalysis—a dimension that, according to them, was there from the beginning, from the very moment that Freud discovered that there were illnesses that “speak”. Frederick Wertz has argued that despite their theoretical divergences, there is a profound agreement in the approach, subject matter, and methods of phenomenology and Freudian psychoanalysis; Richard Boothby has tried to draw parallels between Freud’s metapsychology and phenomenology, via Lacan; while, as we shall see, a Lacanian reading of basic Freudian conceptions has been advocated by Heideggerian scholar and psychoanalyst William Richardson.⁶⁹

Heidegger’s criticism, however, raises an additional, and slightly different question, namely whether the phenomena Freud researched are really in need of an explanation. Heidegger clearly believed that this was not the case. We saw above, for example, how he described Freudian repression as “avoidance in a nonreflective way”.⁷⁰ In Freud’s eyes, such a description would appear as an oversimplification: Freud held that any mental phenomenon, such as a slip of memory, can occur for a number of singular or combined reasons—a phenomenon which he described as *overdetermination*.⁷¹ Heidegger’s “avoidance in a nonreflective way” could very well coexist with an avoidance because of, say, a fear of an unwittingly anticipated emotional strain—or something like this. This is just a description, but it represents the type of conflict that Freud had in mind when he spoke about repression in the first place. To put it differently, *repression* is just the name Freud gave to a phenomenon he observed; to deny that such a phenomenon exists at all on the basis of a criticism regarding Freud’s Cartesian worldview, or to reduce it to something simpler such as “avoidance in a nonreflective way”, would be an *assault* upon the phenomenon, as Heidegger himself would have put it—albeit in a different context.⁷²

⁶⁸ Hermann Lang, Stefan Brunnhuber, and Rudolph F. Wagner, ‘The So-Called Zollikon Seminars: Heidegger as a Psychotherapist’ *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 31 (2003), 349-359, p. 355.

⁶⁹ See ‘Heidegger as Psychotherapist’; Frederick J. Wertz, ‘The Phenomenology of Sigmund Freud’ *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 24/2 (1993), 101-129; Richard Boothby, *Freud as Philosopher: Metapsychology after Lacan* (New York: Routledge, 2001); and Richardson, ‘Heidegger and Psychoanalysis?’.

⁷⁰ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 170. See also above, p. 62.

⁷¹ See for example Sigmund Freud, ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’ [1900a], trans. James Strachey, in Angela Richards (ed.), *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Pelican Freud Library, 4; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 31-871, p. 416. See also below, p. 96.

⁷² See Glazebrook, *Heidegger’s Philosophy of Science*, p. 107.

Approaching these questions from a different point of view, Maurice Merleau-Ponty thought that “phenomenology, ... is converging more than ever with Freudian research”.⁷³ Merleau-Ponty accepted that there *are* indeed mental phenomena in what he called the *limits of consciousness*. As he explained,

since our philosophy [i.e., phenomenology] has given us no better way to express that *intemporal*, that *indestructible* element in us which, says Freud, is the unconscious itself, perhaps we should continue calling it the unconscious—so long as we do not forget that the word is the index of an enigma ... The accord of phenomenology and of psychoanalysis should not be understood to consist in phenomenology’s saying clearly what psychoanalysis had said obscurely. On the contrary, it is by what phenomenology implies or unveils as its limits—by its *latent content* or its *unconscious*—that it is in consonance with psychoanalysis.⁷⁴

A very similar argument has been made by Richard Boothby in his discussion of Medard Boss’s objections. Boothby argues that Boss—and one could say the same for Heidegger, whose views on the subject are virtually identical to Boss’s—“misunderstands the relation of Freud’s theoretical constructions to his clinical experience and ... tends to miss the central intention of Freud’s positing of the unconscious.”⁷⁵ As Boothby points out,

Freud’s theoretical construction of the unconscious functioned not to mechanize or to objectify the human being but rather to conceptualize the possibility of a *split subject* ... ‘split’ because certain domains of [the subject’s] otherwise intelligible material remain unassimilable to free and conscious activity.⁷⁶

But the question still remains. If, as Boothby argues, one grants that Heidegger failed or neglected to take into account the clinical phenomena that Freud observed, and therefore missed Freud’s central intention, and if, as I argue here, Heidegger’s philosophy of *being* is to be taken seriously, then one would still need to reconcile the challenge that Heidegger’s philosophy represents with the basic tenets of Freudian metapsychology. Is this possible?

Let us attend to the question of the unconscious a bit more closely. We see Heidegger claiming that the introduction of such a hypothesis reflects Freud’s Cartesian subject–object worldview and his tendency to adopt uncritically ideas from the natural sciences, such as that of causality. For Heidegger, the “unconscious” is only needed if one sees the human being as an agent, or observer, operating in the world through a window of consciousness/perception and responding to stimuli coming from “outside”. This distinction, however, is not sustained by the phenomena themselves: Heidegger claims that Freud misses the ontological status of Dasein qua being-in-the-world and fails to see that concerned comportment towards beings is only possible when *being* has been revealed to Dasein. Let us grant this to him. Now, if we also accept that Heidegger’s understanding of the phenomena that Freud struggled to study and describe is oversimplified and inadequate, as argued above, then where do we stand?

⁷³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, ‘Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis: Preface to Hesnard’s *L’oeuvre de Freud*’ [1960] in Alden L. Fischer (ed.), *Essential Writings of Merleau-Ponty* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc, 1969), 81–87, p. 85.

⁷⁴ ‘Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis’, p. 86.

⁷⁵ Boothby, ‘Heideggerian Psychiatry?’, p. 145.

⁷⁶ ‘Heideggerian Psychiatry?’, p. 148.

To put it more concretely, if the ontic status of the unconscious is questionable—that is, if there is no justification, philosophically, to postulate such an entity—what is its exact status? Or, more simply: What *is* this unconscious that Freud finds impossible not to postulate?

Attempting to address this very question, M. Guy Thompson has commented that “despite the controversial nature of this concept, there is a pervasive agreement among analysts that whatever the unconscious is, it is certainly not a form of *consciousness*.”⁷⁷ Discussing, among other things, Heidegger’s and Sartre’s views, Thompson suggests that

from Heidegger’s ontological perspective, the unconscious is not a theoretical construct, nor is it ‘in’ my head, but ‘out’ there, in the world, an inescapable dimension of *being*. ... We apprehend it as an enigma, a dimension of our existence that lies hidden one moment, then slips into view the next, only to disappear again, in perpetuity.⁷⁸

John Searle is not satisfied with this understanding of the unconscious as an enigma. He considers this evidence of carelessness. “Since Freud”, he writes,

we have found it useful and convenient to speak glibly about the unconscious mind without paying the price of explaining exactly what we mean. Our picture of unconscious mental states is that they are just like conscious states only minus the consciousness. But what exactly is that supposed to mean? I have not seen a satisfactory answer to that question.⁷⁹

Searle’s point fades a bit as soon as one considers the issues more closely. Indeed there is *no such thing* as a conscious mental state as such. To speak about a conscious or an unconscious mental state is just an abstraction. Freud does, of course, speak about *conscious mental states* in a place or two,⁸⁰ but he only uses the term used figuratively: Consciousness is never static, it’s always on the move, so to speak. Consciousness is always revealed to an observer as a continuous *flow* of data of consciousness, or a *flow of ideas*, as Freud himself sometimes calls it—or a *stream of thought*, as William James would have it.⁸¹ What you find is never a distinct mental state “minus the consciousness” as Searle supposes, but rather a break in the continuity of the stream of consciousness, a gap. In other words, Searle might be attacking a conception of the unconscious that it is not to be found in Freud as such.⁸² It is in this gap that the indirect manifestations of the Freudian unconscious are to be seen, and nowhere else. The question is, how to approach it.

In a similar vein, how can we approach other Freudian “entities” such as, for example, the instincts (or drives)? Freud felt it necessary to introduce them because he wanted to understand (and explain) phenomena such as sexual urge, sexual object choice, etc., or other phenomena such as repetition, trauma etc. For Heidegger, Dasein, in its concerned comportment towards *being*, is always,

⁷⁷ M. Guy Thompson, ‘Is the Unconscious Really all that Unconscious? The Role of Being and Experience in the Psychoanalytic Encounter’ *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 37 (2001), 571-612, p. 571.

⁷⁸ ‘Is the Unconscious Really all that Unconscious?’, p. 610.

⁷⁹ John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), p. 128.

⁸⁰ See for example Freud, ‘The Unconscious’, p. 169.

⁸¹ See Russell Goodman, ‘William James’ *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/james/>>, accessed 10 May 2016.

⁸² D. Livingstone Smith has argued that “Searle’s discussion of Freud underestimates the complexity and subtlety of Freud’s position”, and believes “that [Searle’s] criticisms of Freud are marred by misunderstanding of Freudian claims.” Smith, *Freud’s Philosophy of the Unconscious*, pp. 151, 178.

and already, “ahead” of him/herself, absorbed in a future potentiality-to-be. Dasein is not *driven* or pushed from behind (by an instinct or drive) but turned towards something ahead. To draw on something like a drive “is already a reinterpretation and an objectification into a process, that is, an improper interpretation.”⁸³ Freud’s failure is, therefore, palpable. “If one desires to reduce willing, wishing, propensity, and urge to ‘drives’ one must first ask the contrary question: Is the human being present within the total construct of Freudian libido theory at all?”⁸⁴

It seems that there is no easily accessible common ground on which Heidegger and Freud would have been willing to consider seriously one another’s views. As it stands, a proper dialogue between Freud and Heidegger never took place.⁸⁵ As Askay and Farquhar explain,

according to Freud, it was psychoanalysis that served as the ground of philosophy—and not the reverse, as Heidegger asseverated. ... Freud conceived his ‘metapsychology’ as the ground for everything, including psychoanalysis itself as well as philosophy.⁸⁶

They point out that Heidegger may have failed to consider the Schopenhauerean background of Freud’s “determinism”; but also that Freud would have mistaken Heidegger’s insistence on the ontological dimension of human being for evidence of mysticism.⁸⁷ But this criticism would be unfair as well, as I hope I have shown.

After Freud’s death, psychoanalysis took a variety of different pathways, and many different schools were formed, almost all of them asserting the importance of their descent from Freud but disagreeing substantially with each other. In my view, none of these schools is immune to Heidegger’s critique, but, crucially, not many of them seem to be interested in responding to it.

A different path was followed by Hans Loewald, a former student of Heidegger’s who disillusioned with philosophy re-trained as a psychoanalyst; and by Jacques Lacan, who had, at several points in his teaching, openly acknowledged his debt to Heidegger and Heideggerian ideas. The theories of Loewald and Lacan have a lot in common, as Jonathan Lear points out; their difference lies, he writes, in what they value.⁸⁸ When Loewald came into contact with Lacan’s teaching, he was not so impressed. He did recognise that Lacan had something interesting to say, but wrote that Lacan “interprets Freud in an extremely one-sided and biased way and ... he ends up obscuring whatever contributions he has to offer.”⁸⁹

⁸³ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 173.

⁸⁴ *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 172.

⁸⁵ Askay and Farquhar present an attempt at such a “dialogue” in Askay and Farquhar, *Apprehending the Inaccessible*, pp. 211-229.

⁸⁶ *Apprehending the Inaccessible*, p. 224.

⁸⁷ See *Apprehending the Inaccessible*, pp. 228-229.

⁸⁸ Jonathan Lear, ‘Introduction’ in Hans Loewald, *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Maryland: University Publishing Group, 2000), ix-xl, p. xxii.

⁸⁹ Loewald, quoted in Martin Woessner, *Heidegger in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 85.

Hans Loewald's disillusionment

Loewald was an American psychoanalyst of Jewish-German origin.⁹⁰ He had initially studied philosophy at Freiburg under Heidegger and would have become a philosopher but for Heidegger's connections with National Socialism. This severely alienated Loewald and led to his withdrawal from philosophy. Later he would describe it thus: "My teacher in this field [philosophy] was Martin Heidegger, and I am deeply grateful for what I learned from him, despite his most hurtful betrayal in the Nazi era."⁹¹ Loewald's steps led him to Rome, where he studied medicine. Later, he began his practice as a psychiatrist in Padua before escaping to America when anti-Semitism and political tensions in Mussolini's Italy made it increasingly difficult to practice.

Heideggerian influences are evident in Loewald's point of view and the questions he decided to explore, but he rarely acknowledged them explicitly, at least not until the later years of his teaching. In his 1962 paper 'Superego and Time', for example, he examined "the significance of the future, as a temporal mode, for a deeper understanding of the superego"⁹² and argued that the role that psychoanalysis ascribes to the superego cannot but be seen within a temporal frame, in the sense that the superego always points towards a future ego. There are conspicuous Heideggerian undertones when he says that

Insofar as the superego is the agency of inner standards, demands, hopes and concerns in regard to the ego, the agency of inner rewards and punishments in respect to which the ego experiences contentment or guilt, the superego functions from the viewpoint of a future ego, from the standpoint of the ego's future that is to be reached, is being reached, is being failed or abandoned by the ego.⁹³

And further in the text: "In the structure of the superego, the ego confronts itself in the light of its own future."⁹⁴

Some years later, in a series of lectures he gave at Yale University, he made much more direct references to Heidegger when he compared Freud's dictum, *Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*—translated by him as "where id was, there ego shall come into being"⁹⁵—to Heidegger's thrownness or factuality (in German: *Geworfenheit*):

The factuality of human existence in Heidegger's sense has a different dimension than the psychoanalytic id, and Heidegger does not concern himself with the differentiation of unconscious and conscious mentation. My comparison merely refers to the idea, which both authors have in common, epitomised in the dictum: Become what you are.⁹⁶

In some of his writings Loewald attempted to address the question of the ontological status of various psychoanalytical concepts such as drive (or instinct), instinctual energy, cathexis, etc. He

⁹⁰ Information about Loewald's life has been taken from T. Wayne Downey, 'Hans Loewald M.D. (1906-1993)' *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 75 (1994), 839-842.

⁹¹ Hans Loewald, 'Preface' [1980], *The Essential Loewald: Collected Papers and Monographs* (Hagerstown, Maryland: University Publishing Group, 2000), xli-xliii, pp. xlii-xliii. For Heidegger and the Nazis see also above, pp. 15-17.

⁹² 'Superego and Time', p. 45.

⁹³ 'Superego and Time', p. 45.

⁹⁴ 'Superego and Time', p. 52.

⁹⁵ 'Psychoanalysis', p. 543.

⁹⁶ 'Psychoanalysis', p. 543n5.

criticised, for example, a reading that would see them as direct loans from physics or biology, as well as Freud's unwillingness to abandon his subject–object (i.e., Cartesian) point of view: "Instinct does have psychological meaning and the term has its legitimate use in psychoanalysis only as a psychological concept, and not as a biological or ethological one."⁹⁷ According to Loewald,

Ego and id are psychoanalytic constructs that ... make use of the concept of instinctual energy. ... That the same conception has been used in psychoanalysis [and physics] does not mean that psychoanalysis has taken it over from physics or that it is physical in nature and thus not really applicable in psychological discourse.⁹⁸

In Loewald's view, we can understand Freud's reluctance to revise his concepts in accordance with new insights as a direct result of

[Freud's] theoretical bias in favour of a biological instinct concept, and his reluctance, amounting to an aversion, to involve himself deeply in the investigation of mental stages and states where the subject–object polarity does not hold.⁹⁹

Loewald never abandoned philosophy completely. While it is clear that his questioning was informed by Heidegger, it is also evident that Loewald was not interested in establishing a solid, Heidegger-proof philosophical foundation for psychoanalysis. Disillusioned with philosophy, he was interested in bringing up some questions and pointing at paths that would perhaps be helpful in answering them. Loewald completed his Freud Lectures at Yale thus: "These lectures perhaps have turned out to be, in the end—far more than they should have been—tentative philosophical reflections on psychoanalysis. Some of the things I have discussed I have wanted to say for a long time."¹⁰⁰

As Martin Woessner has commented, "If Heidegger, especially in his brief, delusional attempt to 'lead the Führer', represents the hubris of philosophy, then Loewald represents the humility of therapy."¹⁰¹

William Richardson's attempt at bringing together

William Richardson has always held a special place in the world of Heideggerian philosophers in that he has been a practicing psychoanalyst as well, working in a Lacanian orientation. His *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* has been the first introduction to Heidegger written in English,¹⁰² while the co-authored (with John Muller) *Lacan and Language* was one of the first books to introduce Lacan's thought to the USA.¹⁰³ Richardson had a "didactic" analysis in Paris, in the late 1970s, and after

⁹⁷ 'On Motivation and Instinct Theory', p. 110.

⁹⁸ 'On Motivation and Instinct Theory', pp. 110-111.

⁹⁹ 'On Motivation and Instinct Theory', p. 135.

¹⁰⁰ 'Psychoanalysis', p. 579.

¹⁰¹ Woessner, *Heidegger in America*, p. 87.

¹⁰² William J. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* [1963] (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003).

¹⁰³ John P. Muller and William J Richardson, *Lacan and Language: A Reader's Guide to Écrits* (New York: International Universities Press, 1982).

returning to the USA in 1981 he began a limited psychoanalytic practice. Nevertheless, he never thought of abandoning philosophy in favour of psychoanalysis.

Richardson has written that he was “profoundly convinced that psychoanalysis in general and Lacan in particular are gravely in need of a philosophical base, and that Heidegger’s thinking offers a suggestive paradigm for approaching that task.”¹⁰⁴ In fact, he had been one of the first to explicitly attempt to discuss potential points of contact between Heideggerian philosophy and psychoanalysis. In an early paper, he endeavoured to find a “place” in Heidegger’s conception of the human being qua *Dasein* where the Freudian unconscious could be located. He suggested there that “if a philosophy such as phenomenology ... has a place in it for what is valid in Freud’s insight ... then perhaps psychoanalysis may profit from its help.”¹⁰⁵ His own answer in that “propaedeutic”—as he called it—essay is that “the place of the unconscious in Heidegger is in the ontological dimension of *Dasein*, conceived as a pre-subjective, onto-conscious self”,¹⁰⁶ i.e., in the ontological structure by reason of which *Dasein* is open to *being* and can comport towards beings (entities) as beings. His claim was that this structure, qua structure, is itself not conscious.¹⁰⁷

Richardson returned to the question of the Freudian unconscious in connection to Lacan:

If we understand human being as Being-in-the-world, the whole notion of [Freudian] psychic causality is rendered superfluous ... But ... what Freud discovered in the unconscious was not an unbroken chain of psychic causality but the hidden power of speech, and that the unconscious is structured not like a thermodynamic machine but rather like a language ... This, indeed, is the hypothesis of Lacan.¹⁰⁸

Richardson’s assessment was unambiguous: “My claim is that Lacan’s interpretation of the Freudian unconscious as ‘structured like a language’ desperately needs a philosophical base that mathematical formalism and all the topology in the world cannot give him.”¹⁰⁹ This philosophical base might well be Heidegger’s conception of logos and truth: “The process of logos as *legein*, letting appear, is also a letting truth come to pass. ... This truth, for all of the darkness that surrounds and permeates it, is nonetheless a liberating healing truth that permits the talking cure to cure.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ William J. Richardson, ‘An Unpurloined Autobiography’ in James R. Watson (ed.), *Portraits of American Continental Philosophers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 145–152, p. 150.

¹⁰⁵ ‘The Place of the Unconscious in Heidegger’ [1965] in Keith Hoeller (ed.), *Heidegger & Psychology* (Seattle: Review of Existential Psychology & Psychiatry, 1988), 176–198, p. 183.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Place of the Unconscious’, p. 191.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Heidegger: “Concealment is not the antithesis of consciousness, but rather concealment belongs to the clearing. There is a relationship to clearing which need not be ‘conscious’ and reflected on in the Freudian sense”. Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, pp. 182–183. See also p. 63.

¹⁰⁸ William J. Richardson, ‘The word of Silence’ in Sonu Shamdasani and Michael Münchow (eds.), *Speculations after Freud: Psychoanalysis, Philosophy and Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 167–184, p. 179.

¹⁰⁹ ‘The word of Silence’, p. 182.

¹¹⁰ ‘Phenomenology and Psychoanalysis’ *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, 11/2 (1980), 1–20, p. 19.

Further attempts at a dialogue

Binswanger, Boss, Loewald, and Richardson all tried in one way or another to bring together some of the basic aspects of Heideggerian philosophy, and all shared one very important characteristic. They were all clinicians. They all saw patients in a psychotherapeutic setting and were all faced with the day-to-day challenges of clinical work. There have been other, non-clinical attempts to discuss Freudian psychoanalysis together with Heidegger, but very few of them were systematic or broad in scope. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to mention briefly two of the more recent ones here.

In her *Life and Death in Freud and Heidegger*, Havi Carel attempts to connect Freud with Heidegger through the concepts of life and death as understood and developed by the two thinkers respectively. She criticises Freud's conception of the death drive as having a limited explanatory value and suggests a new reading, locating its importance "in the metaphysical insights that arise from it, such as the intertwining of death in life and the inherent presence of self and other-directed destructiveness in psychic life."¹¹¹ Through her own reading of Heidegger's being-towards-death, Carel then attempts to bring Freud's understanding of the human being, as a being in internal conflict, together with what she considers to be Heidegger's moral imperative—his insistence that Dasein be authentic. It's an interesting approach, but not without its shortcomings. Apart from her somewhat limited—and, in effect, normative—understanding of the Freudian project as a project aimed at reinstating the person's well-being—"its aim," she writes, is "to help people make good on their desires and hopes"¹¹²—the main problem in my view is related to a misunderstanding of the ontological difference, especially with regard to her major concept, Death. This is evident, for example, when she speaks about "the personal nature of death"—referring to what Heidegger calls Dasein's "ownmost", "non-relational" possibility¹¹³—and then comments that "although Heidegger stresses the personal significance of death for each individual, he also emphasises its significance with respect to the social nature of Dasein."¹¹⁴ There is an antinomy here. Talking about the personal significance of death for an individual is not the same as talking about death as Dasein's ownmost non-relational possibility.

In his *Primal Scenes*, Ned Lukacher made a bold attempt to bring Freud, and what he took as his main insight (namely, that psychic suffering relates to forgotten events of the past which would need to be reconstructed and "remembered" during the analysis) together with Heidegger's concept of the forgetfulness of *being*, passing through Lacan and Derrida. For him, Freud and Heidegger meet in their questioning of any narrow understanding of temporal ordering in terms of a timeline extending from a past to a future. He reads the Freudian concept of the primal scene as his category for "a (non-) event whose indeterminant temporality precipitates the temporal ordering of subsequent events", and connects it with Heidegger's being-for-death, which "establishes the subject's historical finitude."¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Havi Carel, *Life and Death in Freud and Heidegger* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), p. 185.

¹¹² *Life and Death*, p. 188.

¹¹³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 294/250-251.

¹¹⁴ Carel, *Life and Death*, pp. 65, 66.

¹¹⁵ Ned Lukacher, *Primal Scenes: Literature, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 38, 39.

From the question of *being* to Lacan

Heidegger's philosophy represents a turning point in the history of ideas in the 20th century. His challenge to a philosophical tradition that began with the ancient Greeks and reached its highest point of coherence and influence with the emergence of Descartes's cogito was enormous. The *form* of the challenge, i.e., Heidegger's insistence on rethinking the question of *being*, was obscure and easy to misconstrue. This did not prevent it from reaching its audience.

Heidegger made manifest the limits of the Cartesian subject–object distinction and pointed at what the problem really was—that of understanding what he called the *meaning of being*. He realised that even philosophy was not adequately equipped to penetrate deeper to this problem, and abandoned its traditional concepts such as metaphysics, fundamental ontology, and the like. Heidegger understood that the problem of the meaning of *being* and its corollaries—the problem of the human being, of truth, of the world—is a problem of language, in the sense that language *creates* or *discloses* a world.

Heidegger's conception of truth as unconcealment, or disclosure, represented a major rupture, a cut, that distanced him from a tradition that saw truth as a simple question of ascertaining the agreement of statements with the state of affairs the statements were about. If Galileo's method represented a rupture with the world of the ancients, Heidegger's thought represents what Badiou calls "the closure of an entire epoch of thought and its concerns."¹¹⁶

Lacan was very aware of all criticisms that Freud's theories attracted but thought they were not enough to warrant an outright dismissal of Freudian thought and its main innovations. He claimed that the spirit of Freud's discoveries had been forgotten or misconstrued, and heralded a *return* to him. In the process Lacan formulated his own version of psychoanalysis, which until the end he insisted on calling Freudian rather than Lacanian; he also found that in the process he was distancing himself from the philosophical background which in the beginning had helped him secure the foundations of his reading of psychoanalysis.

Richardson had suggested that we need to return to Lacan, in the same way that Lacan returned to Freud. We need, Richardson wrote, "to return to the moment of *énonciation* where the speaking subject called Jacques Lacan was at his very best. But this means trying to articulate his un-said, learning to read him as he has taught us to read Freud".¹¹⁷

Richardson did not attempt to bring this return to completion in any systematic way. He did return many times to the question of reading Lacan together with Heidegger, suggesting that Heidegger's ontology is more appropriate for providing a foundation for psychoanalysis than the linguistics and mathematics that Lacan employed, but he never attempted to develop such a synthesis himself. He does not speak about many other aspects of Lacan's teaching.



¹¹⁶ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ William J. Richardson, 'Psychoanalysis and the Being-question' in Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan (eds.), *Psychiatry and the Humanities, Volume 6: Interpreting Lacan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 139-159, p. 157.

Chapter 4: Rereading Freud

The history of psychoanalysis is roughly divided in two periods, one before and one after the Second World War. They are demarcated by the massive exodus of Freud and other psychoanalysts from Austria and Germany because of the Nazi anti-Jewish policies and persecutions of the 1930s, but also by Freud's own death in 1939. After the war, psychoanalysis was to flourish mainly away from its origins, in the UK and the USA, in France, and also in Latin America. Freud's heirs would each follow their own trajectories, forming different schools according to the answers they were each giving to the theoretical problems they encountered.¹

In Francophone countries, developments would be forever marked by the teachings of Lacan, a psychoanalyst of the so-called second generation whose main work belongs solidly in the second, post-Freudian period. Lacan believed that the spirit and radicality of Freud's discovery was being misconstrued and strove throughout his career to reverse that trend. In the words of psychoanalyst and historian of psychoanalysis Elisabeth Roudinesco, "Jacques Lacan sought to bring plague, subversion, and disorder to the moderate Freudianism of his time."² Lacan demanded that psychoanalysts "return to Freud" and read closely what the old master had written. That, he claimed, would be enough to reveal that Freud's main discovery was ignored and misunderstood. "Indeed", he said as early as 1953,

I believe that the return to Freud's texts which my teaching has focused on for the past two years has convinced me ... that there is no firmer grasp on human reality than that provided by Freudian psychoanalysis and that one must return to the source and apprehend, in every sense of the word, these texts.³

Freud's discovery, in Lacan's view, consisted in recognising the extent to which human suffering is dependent on, and subject to, language. His own reading of Freud might have been seen at times as rather idiosyncratic, but Lacan remained for a long time true to his pledge to "return to Freud" by reading Freud's texts closely and referring to them again and again. "It is up to you to be Lacanians if you wish", he said, as late as in 1980. "For my part, I am a Freudian."⁴

In Lacan's opinion, the major failure of the post-Freudian schools of psychoanalysis was their tendency to supersede Freud's focus on language with theories that paid more attention to a supposed biology of instincts, to phylogenetic inheritance, or to physiological development and adaptation to

¹ For a quick survey of the landscape see Editor's introduction in Ross M. Skelton (ed.), *The Edinburgh International Encyclopaedia of Psychoanalysis* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. vii-x.

² Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. xv.

³ Jacques Lacan, 'The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real' [1953], trans. Bruce Fink, *On the Names-of-the-Father* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 1-52, p. 3.

⁴ 'Overture to the 1st International Encounter of the Freudian Field: Caracas, 12 July 1980', trans. Adrian Price, *Hurly-Burly*, 6 (September 2011), 17-20, p. 18.

the demands of life. Lacan insisted that these were misconstructions. Admittedly, Lacan's reading of Freudian theory led him to the development of an entirely new psychoanalytic theory, one whose "regional ontology",⁵ so to speak, was very remote from that of Freud. He was well aware of this:

There is no question ... of my doing the metaphysics of the Freudian discovery and drawing out its consequences for what may be called being, in the widest sense of the term. This is not my intention. This would not be useless, but I think that it can be left to others and that what we are doing here will indicate how it might be approached.⁶

In Lacan's view, for Freud "it is already quite clear that symptoms can be entirely resolved in an analysis of language, because a symptom is itself structured like a language: a symptom is language from which speech must be delivered."⁷ And thus, by calling for a return to Freud, Lacan was calling for a return to the recognition that for the suffering human being language is as crucial—if not more crucial—than biology.

We saw, in earlier chapters, how Heidegger's and other philosophers' critiques of psychoanalysis were meant to expose what they considered the limitations of Freud's thought—for example, its alleged naïve biologism. In view of this, I will argue here that Lacan's work offers a novel and unique way around these arguments by bringing to light the core of Freud's discovery.

In contrast to Freud, who claimed that he did not have any particular philosophical aspirations, Lacan was in close contact and dialogue with many of the most important philosophers of his time. He had followed Alexandre Kojève's Hegel seminars in the 1930s, and was participating in intellectual circles with figures like Roman Jakobson, Jean Hyppolite, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Claude Lévi-Strauss.⁸ Lacan had a particular admiration for Heidegger, and was making frequent allusions to his work in his own teaching. He met Heidegger through a common acquaintance, Jean Baufret, a young philosopher who contributed a lot to the introduction of Heidegger's thought to the French intelligentsia, and who incidentally was also one of Lacan's analysands. In 1955, Lacan received Heidegger's permission to translate his essay 'Logos', which was then published in the first issue of *La Psychanalyse*.⁹ Lacan and Heidegger met a few times, the last time being in 1975. Lacan even sent him a signed copy of his *Écrits* and tried, during his last visit, to interest him in the latest formulations of his theories.

Apparently Heidegger remained unimpressed. "It seems to me", he wrote to Medard Boss, that the psychiatrist needs a psychiatrist."¹⁰

⁵ "Regional" in the sense Heidegger used the term. See above, p. 45.

⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses* [1955-56], ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russel Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1993), p. 73.

⁷ 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis' [1953], trans. Bruce Fink, Héloïse Fink, and Russell Grigg, *Écrits* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), 197-268, p. 223/269.

⁸ See Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Lacan: The Absolute Master*, trans. Douglas Brick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 1.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, 'Logos', trans. Jacques Lacan, *La Psychanalyse*, 1 (1956), 59-79. For a critical (and humorous) discussion of Lacan's choices in this translation see David Farrell Krell, 'Is There a Heidegger—or for that Matter, a Lacan—Beyond all Gathering?' in Jeffrey Powell (ed.), *Heidegger and Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 201-223. An English translation of Heidegger's paper can be found in Martin Heidegger, 'Logos (Heraclitus, Fragment B 50)' [1954], trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi, *Early Greek Thinking: The Dawn of Western Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 59-78.

¹⁰ *Zollikon Seminars*, pp. 280-281.

Approaching a body of work

Lacan published relatively little during his lifetime. A collection of some of his talks and a few previously published papers appeared in print in 1966. A selection of some of these papers appeared in English in 1977,¹¹ while a full translation had to wait until 2006.¹² Lacan's teaching consisted mainly of his seminar, held without interruption, apart from summer breaks and other holidays, for almost 30 years. Transcriptions of seminar sessions were circulating among his pupils for reference and discussion, and eventually started being published in an "established" form by his son-in-law, Jacques-Alain Miller. "Lacan", wrote Jacques-Alain Miller,

is not an author.. His work is a teaching. We must take this into consideration; we must know that following his star requires that we do not synchronise and dogmatise his teaching, that we do not hide but rather stress its contradictions, its antinomies, its deadlocks, its difficulties. For a teaching on the analytic experience is like a *work in progress* and implies a back and forth motion between text and experience.¹³

At the time of this writing, 2016, many of Lacan's seminars remain unpublished, and even more are without an official translation. This understandably slow process presents the researcher with a number of problems. What is one to do with those of Lacan's seminars which are not yet available? How are we to approach those texts that are available in various versions differing slightly one from the other? What about the absence of definitive or good English translations for many of them? What about the various unauthorised translations of some of the unauthorised French versions?

A further question is about Lacan's teaching itself.

Unsurprisingly, many (if not all) Lacanian concepts and terms change gradually in the course of his teaching; at the end some of them become so different from what they were in the beginning that they are completely unrecognisable. An example that most readily springs to mind is the term "jouissance", which undergoes a heavy transformation from its first technical appearance in 1958 to its elaborations in the later seminars of Lacan.¹⁴ We reach here a problem similar to the one we encountered when discussing Heidegger's conceptual pathway. What is the best way to approach this?

Many scholars choose to present a chronological exposition. They follow concepts and their development by putting them in the context of Lacan's teaching at any given moment. This is a valid and respectful approach that can give a more or less clear overview of the meandering character of Lacan's thinking and presentation—but it runs the risk of placing unwarranted stress on potential conceptual anachronisms and creating a false impression of inconsistency.

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* [1966], trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, 1977).

¹² *Écrits* [1966], trans. Bruce Fink, Héloïse Fink, and Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006). To facilitate cross-referencing, all references to *Écrits* as a whole, or to papers from the *Écrits*, will also include the French original page number after a slash.

¹³ Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Extimité' [1985-86], trans. Françoise Massardier-Kenney, in Mark Bracher et al. (eds.), *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 74-87, p. 75.

¹⁴ Dylan Evans enumerates quite a few different nuances of jouissance in Lacan's work: Jouissance as pleasure, or as orgasm; as desire; as an ethical stance; as jouissance of the Other; as feminine, or of the body; as connected to language. Dylan Evans, 'From Kantian Ethics to Mystical Experience: An Exploration of Jouissance' in Dany Nobus (ed.), *Key Concepts of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Rebus Press, 1998), 1-28, pp. 2-13.

It is for this reason that my approach—for the purpose of this research—will be different. I shall try to visualise Lacan's work as if from a (future) retrospective vantage point. I shall attempt to benefit from an artificial, so to speak, hindsight, approaching Lacan's major concepts as if they were available in their eventual form almost from the beginning. Thus, I will be taking their different forms as attempts at their elucidation. I am of course aware that this was not exactly the case. For example, it cannot be argued seriously that a concept such as *jouissance*—to stay with this particular example—meant exactly the same for Lacan at the beginning and at the end of his teaching. But while the actual content of the term is, for Lacan, very changeable, only slowly becoming more clarified, in the course of many years of teaching, the way it fits together with the rest of Lacan's conceptual constructions does not change too much. It appears as if the concept and its connotations become gradually less blurry.

In effect, it is as if Lacan himself is cleaning up his act as he moves forward. Some of his older concepts, hypotheses, and models are abandoned or replaced, while others—the ones that prove to be important or fruitful—are fine-tuned or further elaborated. Identifying these, let's call them, persistent threads from our retrospective vantage point allows for the outlining of a remarkably consistent body of work. This approach will allow me to comb the theory, so to speak, clearing up each concept from extraneous elements, and presenting it in as clear and succinct a way as is conceivably possible in its connections to other concepts and terms. In this way, I will be building on one of Lacan's own comments on his work: "My discourse proceeds, in the following way: each term is sustained only in its topological relation with the others."¹⁵ In other words I shall approach the Lacanian opus accepting that it is exactly this, an opus, a complete, self-consistent body of *work*—the term "work" used here in the sense utilised by Jean-Claude Milner in his *Considerations of a Work*.

The notion of a work is a modern one, provided we understand it in its narrow sense, that is to say as the principle of uniqueness ... centred on a naming system—the author's name and the work's title—which subsumes material production, in particular that of the text, under the regime of the One. In other words, the work is not necessarily *one* book; neither is it even necessarily a *book*. The work is not composed of matter; it is rather a form, one which organises culture.¹⁶

In addition to this *diachronic* aspect of Lacan's theories, there is an equally important *synchronic* aspect pertaining to his teaching style as such. At any given moment in his career, Lacan delivered his theories as if they were products of a fully functioning and self-consistent generative model. At least this is how his teaching appears to an observer. Lacan presented himself as having a whole theory at his disposal, choosing to deliver to his audience as much as was needed in order to build an argument or make a point. He would leave out all explicit theoretical justification or references for the steps he was taking, opting instead for an aphoristic exposition full of hints, allusions, and suggestions.

This of course contributed a lot to the notorious opacity of his style, but in practical terms it gave him the theoretical freedom to explore ideas and develop new conceptual models and hypotheses as he saw fit. Be it as it may, Lacan's choice provides us with a further justification to consider his work as if it were a complete, self-consistent corpus; at any given moment he presented it as such.

¹⁵ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* [1964-65], ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), p. 89.

¹⁶ See Jean-Claude Milner, 'Considerations of a Work' [1995], trans. James Penney, *Journal for Lacanian Studies*, 4/1 (2006), 141-158, p. 142.

Revisiting Freud's discovery

As we have seen, Freud's work became the target of many philosophical criticisms. The debate persists and is sometimes referred to as the Freud Wars, after "an acrimonious exchange of reviews, responses, and counter-charges on the nature and validity of psychoanalysis" that took place in the mid-1990s in pages of the *New York Review of Books*.¹⁷

A classic text in which psychoanalysis is dismissed as pseudoscience is Karl Popper's *Conjectures and Refutations*, an English rewriting of an earlier book of his, published in 1934 in German. According to Popper, a theory or hypothesis can only be considered scientific if it can be put to the test and run the risk of being rejected. It doesn't need to be rejected, of course. It only needs to run the risk. For this reason, psychoanalysis cannot be thought of as scientific. Its claims can never tested (and possibly falsified); and accordingly it is "simply non-testable, irrefutable".¹⁸

Freud himself attempted to tackle these arguments in his 1937 paper, 'Constructions in Analysis':

It is true that we do not accept the 'No' of a person under analysis at its face value; but neither do we allow his 'Yes' to pass. There is no justification for accusing us of invariably twisting his remarks into a confirmation. In reality things are not so simple and we do not make it so easy for ourselves to come to a conclusion.¹⁹

The analyst, Freud stressed, should rather focus on the progress of the work as a result of their interventions and to new material that these interventions contributed in eliciting. It is this that would provide the analyst with the conceptual tools needed to assess the confirmation or refutation of his or her hypotheses. "Reactions on the part of the patient are rarely unambiguous and give no opportunity for a final judgement. Only the further course of the analysis enables us to decide whether our constructions are correct or unserviceable."²⁰

Freud's argument would not be convincing for Popper. He would counter that clinical observations are "like any other observations, [i.e., they] are *interpretations in the light of theories* ...; and for this reason alone they are apt to support those theories in the light of which they were interpreted."²¹ Popper conceded that he had no doubt that much of what Freud says

is of considerable importance, and may well play its part one day in a psychological science which is testable. But ... those 'clinical observations' which analysts naïvely believe confirm their theory cannot do this anymore than the daily confirmations which astrologers find in their practice.' And as for Freud's epic of the Ego, the Super-ego, and the Id, no substantially stronger claim to scientific status can be made for it than for Homer's collected stories from Olympus.

¹⁷ Lavinia Gomez, *The Freud Wars: An introduction to the Philosophy of Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 5-6.

¹⁸ Karl R. Popper, 'Science: Conjectures and Refutations' [1961], *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 2002), 43-86, p. 49.

¹⁹ Sigmund Freud, 'Constructions in Analysis' [1937d], trans. James Strachey, in James Strachey (ed.), *Moses and Monotheism, An Outline of Psycho-Analysis and Other Works* (Standard Edition, Volume XXIII (1937-1939); London: Hogarth Press, 1966), 255-270, p. 262.

²⁰ 'Constructions in Analysis', p. 265.

²¹ Popper, 'Science: Conjectures and Refutations', p. 49n3.

These theories describe some facts, but in the manner of myths. They contain most interesting psychological suggestions, but not in a testable form.²²

Ludwig Wittgenstein, who made frequent references to Freud and psychoanalysis, also felt that Freud has been able to see something, but he too was rather sceptical of Freud's explanations and theories. Wittgenstein argued that at the heart of Freud's argument lies a fundamental confusion between a retrospective explanation of a reason on one hand and a hypothesis about causation on the other. "When we laugh without knowing why," Wittgenstein said during his Cambridge Lectures,

Freud claims that by psychoanalysis we can find out. I see a muddle here between a cause and a reason. Being clear why you laugh is not being clear about a *cause*. If it were, then agreement to the analysis given of a joke as explaining why you laugh would not be a means of detecting it. The success of the analysis is supposed to be shown by the person's agreement. ... The difference between a reason and a cause is brought up as follows: the investigation of a reason entails as an essential part one's agreement with it, whereas the investigation of a cause is carried out experimentally.²³

It is interesting to note that Wittgenstein's argument here is very similar to that of Heidegger, who had pointed out that to attribute something to an "unconscious intention is an explanation as opposed to a phenomenological interpretation. This explanation is a pure hypothesis that in no way advances the understanding of the phenomenon itself."²⁴ These are important criticisms that should not be left unanswered.

Adolf Grünbaum attempted to challenge Popper's claim regarding the scientific status of psychoanalysis; nevertheless, he argued that psychoanalytical clinical evidence as such can never be an adequate foundation for psychoanalysis' core hypotheses and metapsychology.²⁵ Others attempted to look into psychoanalysis from a phenomenological angle, stressing its hermeneutic dimension.²⁶

A relatively early attempt to evaluate psychoanalytic claims by means of a meta-analysis of all relevant scientific research was made by Paul Kline, whose *Fact and Fantasy in Freudian Theory* aimed "to establish what parts of Freudian theory have been confirmed or, at least could be confirmed by objective, scientific psychological research."²⁷ Its conclusion:

²² 'Science: Conjectures and Refutations', p. 49.

²³ Wittgenstein, quoted in Jacques Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud: The Myth of the Unconscious*, trans. Carol Cosman (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 26.

²⁴ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 169. See also Bouveresse, *Wittgenstein Reads Freud*, pp. 69, 70, 95; Smith, *Freud's Philosophy of the Unconscious*, pp. 132-136; and also above, pp. 60ff.

²⁵ Adolf Grünbaum, *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis: A Philosophical Critique* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Grünbaum's arguments have been carefully deconstructed by Paul Robinson in Paul Robinson, *Freud and his Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 179-266. See also David Sachs, 'In fairness to Freud: A critical notice of *The Foundations of Psychoanalysis*, by Adolf Grünbaum' in Jerome Neu (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Freud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 309-338.

²⁶ See Paul Ricoeur, *Freud & Philosophy: An essay on interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Hermann Lang, *Language and the Unconscious: Jacques Lacan's Hermeneutics of Psychoanalysis* [1973], trans. Thomas Brockelman (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1997).

²⁷ Paul Kline, *Fact and Fantasy in Freudian Theory* (London: Methuen & Co, 1972), p. ix.

Any blanket rejection of Freudian theory ... simply flies in the face of the evidence. ... [But] it would be wrong to assume that ... the whole or even the majority of psychoanalytic theory must be accepted on the grounds that failure to confirm the rest is due to the methodological problems of verification.²⁸

The project of scientific verification of psychoanalysis in this manner continues, and still attracts a lot of publicity when some results are published. One recent example of such research is the ongoing *Tavistock Adult Depression Study*,²⁹ a randomised controlled trial in the NHS to establish whether long-term psychoanalytic psychotherapy provides lasting relief to patients suffering from treatment-resistant depression. The findings are, again, positive. Nevertheless, seen in the light of Heidegger's critique of science, the whole attempt of scientific verification or refutation of psychoanalysis is revealed as unsatisfactory, and its findings are shown to be beside the point.

Freud could not foresee the scope and hostility of all later criticisms, which became more prevalent three, four or even more than four decades after his death, nor could he do anything about it. The debate continues.³⁰ A careful evaluation of some of these criticisms has been presented by Paul Robinson. His focus is on those critics

who offered the most systematic, original, and disturbing (if not always the most hostile) reinterpretations of Freud's life and thought ... the historian of science Frank Sulloway, the Sanskrit scholar and sometime psychoanalyst Jeffrey Masson, and the philosopher of science Adolf Grünbaum. ... What they share is simply a marked hostility to Freud, as well as the talent and industry to have created counterinterviews whose weight and ingeniousness require that they be taken seriously.³¹

Robinson's conclusion was that they "are poorly founded and seem unlikely to have an enduring effect on our image of Freud. None of the three makes his case. Ultimately each of them fails for empirical reasons."³²

Attending to the phenomena

Freud was not the first to observe that people have dreams, make slips of the tongue, or suffer from unexplainable hysterical symptoms. He was not even the first to study them.³³ But he was the first who, after turning his systematic attention to these phenomena, decided that they were meaningful and began studying them as meaningful. As he commented in the first chapter of his *Interpretation of Dreams*,

It is difficult to write a history of the scientific study of the problems of dreams because, however valuable that study may have been at a few points, no line of advance in any particular direction can be traced. No foundation has been

²⁸ *Fact and Fantasy in Freudian Theory*, p. 346.

²⁹ See Peter Fonagy et al., 'Pragmatic randomized controlled trial of long-term psychoanalytic psychotherapy for treatment-resistant depression: the Tavistock Adult Depression Study (TADS)' *World Psychiatry*, 14/3 (09/25 2015), 312-321.

³⁰ See for example Donald Levy, *Freud Among the Philosophers: The Psychoanalytic Unconscious and its Philosophical Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996); Smith, *Freud's Philosophy of the Unconscious*; Paul-Laurent Assoun, *Freud, la philosophie et les philosophes* [1976] (Paris: Quadrige / Puf, 2005); and Jonathan Lear, *Freud* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

³¹ Robinson, *Freud and his Critics*, p. 5.

³² *Freud and his Critics*, p. 267.

³³ For a fascinating and detailed survey of what he calls dynamic psychiatry, with a special focus on the theoretical systems of Janet, Freud, Adler, and Jung, as well as on their precursors see Ellenberger, *Discovery of the Unconscious*.

laid of secure findings upon which a later investigator might build; but each new writer examines the same problems afresh and begins again, as it were from the beginning.³⁴

And elsewhere:

Small failures of functioning, like the temporary forgetting of normally familiar proper names, slips of the tongue and of the pen, and so on, had hitherto not been considered worthy of any explanation at all or were supposed to be accounted for by conditions of fatigue, by distraction of the attention, etc.³⁵

Freud devised a tool in order to study these phenomena—namely, free association—and developed a number of hypotheses, models, and theories to understand them, describe them, and account for them. In my view, Freud’s work should be approached by distinguishing between the mental phenomena that his theory talked about—i.e., the subject matter proper of psychoanalysis—and the theories that he developed.

Freud was in no doubt about his claim that psychoanalysis is a science: he was working with observations, hypotheses, refutations of hypotheses and so on. He considered his a purely scientific endeavour, only directed by his quest for truth, which, he believed, can only be approached with the help of the tools of science, and he did not have much time for philosophy. “I must confess”, he wrote in 1926,

that I am not at all partial to the fabrication of *Weltanschauungen*. Such activities may be left to philosophers, who avowedly find it impossible to make their journey through life without a Baedeker of that kind to give them information on every subject. Let us humbly accept the contempt with which they look down on us from the vantage-ground of their superior needs. ... We know well enough how little light science has so far been able to throw on the problems that surround us. But however much ado the philosophers may make, they cannot alter the situation. Only patient, persevering research, in which everything is subordinated to the one requirement of certainty, can gradually bring about a change.³⁶

He returned to this in his *New Introductory Lectures* some years later: “As a specialist science, a branch of psychology—a depth psychology or psychology of the unconscious—[psychoanalysis] is quite unfit to construct a *Weltanschauung* of its own: it must accept the scientific one.”³⁷

Concepts, basic assumptions and hypotheses of psychoanalysis

My starting point in what follows is that most of Freud’s concepts—such as libido, instincts (or drives), the unconscious, the mental apparatus—do not pertain to “real” entities that exist independently from the theory within which they appear. I shall take them as descriptive attempts, as models that aim to represent, study, and understand the phenomena that constitute the subject matter of psychoanalysis.

³⁴ Freud, ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’, pp. 61–62.

³⁵ ‘A Short Account of Psychoanalysis’ [1924f], trans. James Strachey, in Albert Dickson (ed.), *Historical and Expository Works on Psychoanalysis* (Pelican Freud Library, 15; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 159–182, p. 170.

³⁶ ‘Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety’ [1926d], trans. James Strachey, in Angela Richards (ed.), *On Psychopathology* (Pelican Freud Library, 10; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), 227–333, pp. 247–248.

³⁷ ‘New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis’ [1933a], trans. James Strachey, in James Strachey and Angela Richards (eds.), *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (Pelican Freud Library, 2; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), 29–247, p. 193.

In his posthumously published *Outline of Psychoanalysis* Freud begins by stating very concisely the basic assumption of psychoanalysis:

We know two kinds of things about what we call our psyche (or mental life): its bodily organ, and scene of action, the brain (or nervous system), and on the other hand, our acts of consciousness which are immediate data and cannot be further explained by any sort of description. Everything that lies between, i.e., between the brain and the immediate data of consciousness, is unknown to us, and the data do not include any direct relation between these two terminal points of our knowledge. If it existed it would at the most afford an exact localisation of the processes of consciousness and would give us no help towards understanding them.³⁸

So, for Freud, our mental life is a product of a bodily organ, the brain. He accepts that there is, in principle, some sort of correspondence between what is mental (or psychical) and what is bodily (or physical, i.e., the brain as such, the nervous system, etc.); he emphasises, however, that this correspondence does not allow for a reduction of the former to the latter: different tools and hypotheses are needed. Freud sees psychoanalysis as that set of tools and hypotheses which can help clarify confusions, solve problems, and answer questions, raising new ones, as needed, just as science does.

It is on this ground that Freud puts forward the two fundamental hypotheses of psychoanalysis. According to the first, our psychical or mental life is a function of a structured and spatially localised apparatus: “Mental life is the function of an apparatus to which we ascribe the characteristics of being extended in space and of being made up of several portions.”³⁹ According to the second, there are aspects of psychical life which are not included in what we can know in our so-called conscious processes, i.e., they are unconscious:

Conscious processes do not form unbroken sequences which are complete in themselves. ... There are physical or somatic processes which are concomitant with the psychical ones and which we should necessarily have to recognise as more complete than the psychical sequences, since some of them would have conscious processes parallel to them but others would not.⁴⁰

Elsewhere Freud had argued that the concept of the unconscious is both “necessary” and “legitimate” — necessary in the sense that it allows us an understanding of various mental phenomena and legitimate because its introduction does not involve more arbitrary steps than needed for the introduction of the concept of consciousness.⁴¹ He thought, however, that the unconscious is more than just a useful concept. He considered it to be a mental entity that very possibly had a biological counterpart in the brain, as his parable regarding a mythical “most simplified” living organism might indicate.⁴²

These two hypotheses together suffice as a foundation for the whole psychoanalytic enterprise. The localisation hypothesis allows Freud to develop a model of this “mental apparatus”, which, with the help of his second hypothesis, namely that of the unconscious, is freed from the constraints of the

³⁸ ‘An Outline of Psychoanalysis’, pp. 375-376.

³⁹ ‘An Outline of Psychoanalysis’, p. 376.

⁴⁰ ‘An Outline of Psychoanalysis’, p. 389.

⁴¹ ‘The Unconscious’, p. 168.

⁴² See ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, pp. 297-298.

fragmented nature of the immediate “data of consciousness”. The novelty of Freud’s thought is, in my view, threefold.

The first of Freud’s innovations is his recognition that the *mental life* and *consciousness* are not synonymous. There are always discontinuities or gaps in the flow of the immediate data of consciousness, and yet these discontinuities belong to mental life as well. Freud took these discontinuities or gaps to be meaningful; he urged that these discontinuities be considered as absences that can have a meaning, or can be reflected upon—in just the same way that a gap because of a book missing from a bookshelf tells us something about the bookshelf and its owner.

Freud’s second innovation is the very tool he devised to explore these discontinuities—namely free association. Its design implies that, in Freud’s view, the only one who might be holding a key for interpreting mental phenomena is the individual involved, and that this key involves talking. The implications are enormous. For example, if real pain and suffering can be inflicted to the body according to lay ideas about its functioning and not according to anatomical facts, as was shown to happen in some cases of hysteria, this can only mean that ideas, i.e., words, i.e., language, are very powerful, and the body is subject to them.

Freud’s third and most important innovation is his postulate that in principle all mental phenomena can be thought of as meaningful in ways that involve the individual concerned: A dream you have is a dream that concerns and involves *you*. A slip of the tongue is a slip of *your own* tongue. The actual details of the explanation, and the hypotheses these details involve, are almost irrelevant as long as we recognise that there was something in those phenomena that had something to do with you.

In summary, I will take Freud’s discovery as focusing around three points: a) All aspects of one’s psychical life can be thought of as meaningful for the individual involved; b) There are aspects of what we consider to be psychical that are not immediately available to consciousness; c) the body can suffer in ways dictated by language. Points (a) and (b) opened to him the possibility of formulating theoretical models of how this non-conscious agency works; point (c) confirmed that speech is a powerful enough tool to deal with this kind of suffering. Seen in this way, one aspect of Freud’s discovery becomes a bit more protected from attacks by the philosopher. For example, in his Zollikon Seminars we see Heidegger claiming that Freud

postulates an unbroken [chain] of explanation, that is, the continuity of causal connections. ... The postulate is the complete explanation of psychical life whereby explanation and understanding are identified. This postulate is not derived from the psychical phenomena themselves but is a postulate of modern natural science.⁴³

This is an argument that echoes Wittgenstein’s regarding the alleged muddle (in Freud’s thinking) between a reason and a cause. Freud indeed seems at rare points to be claiming that the laws he discovers can have predictive power;⁴⁴ much more often, however, he talks about retroaction, retrospective interpretation, or “tracing back”: “the phenomena can be traced back to incompletely

⁴³ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 208.

⁴⁴ I was able to locate just one passage where Freud speaks about prediction. It is in his *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*: “My hypothesis is that this ... is not left to arbitrary psychical choice but follows paths which can be predicted and which conform to laws”. Sigmund Freud, ‘The Psychopathology of Everyday Life’ [1901], trans. James Strachey, in Angela Richards (ed.), *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (Pelican Freud Library, 5; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 31-382, p. 38.

suppressed psychical material, which, although pushed away by consciousness, has nevertheless not been robbed of all capacity for expressing itself.”⁴⁵

In other words, Freud does not claim that certain psychical material will invariably bring about specific psychic phenomena, but rather that you can take any current manifestation of mental life and retrospectively trace back to its origins which have been obscured (or “repressed”). In the process you effect a change in the older material by allowing it to express itself again: this is what psychoanalysis, as a therapeutic method, does.

Retroaction, secondary revision, time

The idea of retroaction—i.e., that a change in one’s psychic life can be effected retroactively—was one of Freud’s most important insights. I use this term, retroaction, to translate the German term *Nachträglichkeit*, which the *Standard Edition* of Freud’s work has rendered as *deferred action*.⁴⁶ Freud first introduced it in his so-called *Project for a Scientific Psychology* in 1895,⁴⁷ in order to refer to those psychic phenomena where an event or a series of events exercises some kind of retroactive influence on something that has happened in the past. He employed it repeatedly in his clinical work,⁴⁸ but perhaps not so often in his later theoretical work.

Nonetheless, the idea behind it can be seen at work in Freud’s understanding of how psychoanalysis works, as well as in other theoretical constructions, such as in the so-called *secondary revision*, a process of dream work whereby people attempt to retroactively smooth out the gaps they observe when they speak of one of their dreams.⁴⁹ Most importantly, it can be seen at work in analysis itself. Both concepts, retroaction and secondary revision, bring up the question of time.

In thinking about time, Freud seemed to be concerned with two different problems, the first being the origins of our conscious awareness and perception of time, and the other regarding the time-related functions of the mental apparatus as such—its internal clock, so to speak. In connection to the first question, Freud believed that the concept of time, the one that we hold in our consciousness, is a construction: “Our abstract idea of time seems to be wholly derived from the method of working of the system *Pcpt.-Cs.* [Perception-Consciousness] and to correspond to a perception on its own part of that method of working.”⁵⁰ In contrast to this, he had claimed

⁴⁵ ‘The Psychopathology of Everyday Life’, p. 344.

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the unforeseen (and unwelcomed) repercussions of this translation see Helmut Thomä and Neil Chesire, ‘Freud’s *Nachträglichkeit* and Strachey’s “Deferred Action”: Trauma, Constructions and the Direction of Causality’ *International Review of Psycho-Analysis*, 18 (1991), 407-427, p. 407.

⁴⁷ See Sigmund Freud, ‘Project for a Scientific Psychology’ [1895], trans. James Strachey, in James Strachey (ed.), *Pre-Psycho-Analytic Publications and Unpublished Drafts* (Standard Edition, Volume I (1886-1899); London: Hogarth Press, 1966), 281-391, p. 356.

⁴⁸ See, for example, Freud’s discussion of a dream where a four year old boy is thought to be retroactively assigning a meaning to a scene he had witnessed at the age of eighteen months in ‘From a History of an Infantile Neurosis (The “Wolf Man”)’ [1918b], trans. James Strachey, in Angela Richards (ed.), *Case Histories II* (Pelican Freud Library, 9; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 233-366, p. 278.

⁴⁹ See ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’, pp. 628-650; and also ‘New Introductory Lectures’, p. 50.

⁵⁰ ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, p. 300.

that the processes of the system *Ucs.* [Unconscious] are *timeless*; i.e., they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all. Reference to time is bound up, once again, with the work of the system *Cs.* [Consciousness].⁵¹

It was this timelessness that would help explain retroaction and secondary revision as psychic phenomena. If it is possible for a current event to exercise some kind of influence on a past event, that can only imply that the mental representations of the events are indistinguishable in regards to the time of their occurrence: there is nothing that could make one see which one is first and which one is second. They are only ordered in reference to an interpretative narrative the subject employs in order to include these events in their history. This interpretative narrative is retroactively subject to multiple secondary revisions as needed, with its elements becoming *overdetermined*.⁵²

In connection to the second question, that of the “internal clock” of the mental apparatus, Freud developed a functional model of the system *Pcpt.* whereby perception of time is derived from the periodicity of its functioning. In a short 1925 paper Freud tried to describe this in more detail, using the simile of a small “contrivance”, as he called it, the *Mystic Writing Pad*, that allowed one to take notes, providing “both an ever-ready receptive surface and permanent traces of the notes that have been made upon it.”⁵³ According to Freud it is this periodicity that serves as a kind of clocking mechanism, on the basis of the assumption that perception and memory are two mutually exclusive functions.

As I have argued elsewhere, the limitation of Freud’s thinking about time is that there is no way to derive conscious awareness of time from the way one postulates the mechanism of system *Pcpt.-Cs.* to operate, however elaborate one’s understanding might be.⁵⁴ This is to say that even if his *Mystic Writing Pad* simile were appropriate and to the point, still Freud has not succeeded in showing how awareness of time is produced. Awareness of time and operation of time, as internal clock, are on different, *incommunicable* levels.

It appears that Freud (who during his studies in Vienna attended Brentano’s lectures) was heavily influenced by Brentano’s endeavour to develop an epistemological approach on which empirical psychology could be founded.⁵⁵ Brentano used the notion of duration to explain how a cognitive mechanism which gathers data from an external world transforms this data into an awareness of time, objects, and interactions between objects. As Joel Pearl comments “the conceptual network underlying Freud’s thinking about time is restricted to a linear notion of time”⁵⁶ stemming from Brentano’s influence. Pearl shows that

⁵¹ ‘The Unconscious’, p. 191.

⁵² For overdetermination see for example ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’, p. 416.

⁵³ ‘The “Mystic Writing Pad”’, p. 431.

⁵⁴ See Christos Tombras, ‘Kicking Down the Ladder: Language, Time, History’ *Journal of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research*, 19 (2009), 119-137, pp. 121-123.

⁵⁵ For Freud’s contact with Brentano see Smith, *Freud’s Philosophy of the Unconscious*, pp. 9-15.

⁵⁶ Joel Pearl, *A Question of Time: Freud in the Light of Heidegger’s Temporality*, trans. Amir Atsmon and Joel Pearl (Amsterdam: Contemporary Psychoanalytic Studies, 2013), p. 75.

By establishing his model of the psyche according to Brentano's epistemology, Freud unconsciously incorporated its underlying notion of time. From this moment on, the further development of Freudian psychoanalysis was routed along a specific path, from which it was never diverted.⁵⁷

He concludes that Freudian psychoanalysis "explains the phenomenon of temporality ... as the product of a cognitive system of presentations, as a necessary side-effect within an inner world founded upon a mechanistic and linear notion of time."⁵⁸ This explanation of time, Pearl contends, is not adequate—a view that I share. Pearl contrasts the Cartesian viewpoint of Brentano (and Freud) to a phenomenological pathway which, starting from Husserl, also a student of Brentano, leads to Heidegger, a student of Husserl.

Returning to Freud's discovery, it is my view that the reading just presented is more faithful to Freud's spirit (and letter): if speech is a powerful enough tool to deal with psychic suffering, this might be so because it allows discontinuities and gaps in the chain of the immediate data of one's consciousness to be retroactively thought of, reflected upon, and interpreted.

It reveals, however, a certain limitation, namely the incomplete elaboration on his part of the position of consciousness—especially as a result of his recognition that consciousness cannot be thought of as synonymous with mental life. Freud himself struggled with this limitation, as evidenced by his dissatisfaction with his paper on *Consciousness*, which was supposed to be part of the 12 planned papers on *Metapsychology*.⁵⁹ Freud attempted to break free from the limitation by introducing a different, structural model of the mind.⁶⁰ However, this model too was based on a "Cartesian conception" of an "encapsulated ego-subject", as Richardson had put it, and as such remains vulnerable to the philosopher's criticisms.⁶¹

Lacan's return to Freud

It is at this precise point that I see Lacan entering the picture. Lacan, a psychiatrist turned psychoanalyst, reads Freud and recognises the enormous potential Freud's ideas unleash for the understanding and alleviation of human suffering. He also acknowledges the inciseness of criticisms and arguments such as those of Heidegger or Wittgenstein, and, as Sergio Benvenuto argues, shares with them the rejection of the belief that psychoanalytic theory can contribute to the scientific study of the human mind as an object.⁶² Lacan never ceased to acknowledge his enormous debt to Freud. Lacan's "return to Freud" is but an attempt to bring this to light and work out the implications.

"It is curious to note," Lacan says,

⁵⁷ *A Question of Time*, pp. 101-102.

⁵⁸ *A Question of Time*, p. 102.

⁵⁹ Of these 12 papers only five were published. The manuscripts of the other seven were not found, even though it is known that they had been written. See Jones, *Freud, Life and Work*, Vol. 2, pp. 208-209; and Gay, *Freud: A Life*, p. 373.

⁶⁰ See Freud, 'The Ego and the Id'.

⁶¹ Richardson, 'Heidegger and Psychoanalysis?', p. 14. See also above, pp. 81-83.

⁶² See Sergio Benvenuto, 'Wittgenstein and Lacan Reading Freud' *Journal for Lacanian Studies*, 4/1 (2006), 99-120.

even if in this case it is not absolutely proven, that words are the only material of the unconscious. It is not proven but it is probable (and in any case I have never said that the unconscious was an assemblage of words, but that the unconscious is precisely structured).⁶³

The crucial importance of language (and speech) for psychoanalysis was of course acknowledged from its very beginning. It is known that Freud followed in the footsteps of Joseph Breuer, who was conducting sessions of what Anna O., one of his (Breuer's) patients, named the "talking cure". Even before that, while in Paris, in 1888, Freud had written a paper in which, as Ernest Jones writes, he made a "comparative study of hysterical and organic paralyses so as to ascertain whether their different origins, one mental, the other physical, produced differences in the nature of the paralyses themselves."⁶⁴ His main finding was that hysteria behaves according to the patient's lay conceptions and beliefs of how the body operates. He discovered, that is, that the hysteric's body suffered in ways dictated by ideas—i.e., language—and not by anatomy:

*In its paralyses and other manifestations, hysteria behaves as though anatomy did not exist or as though it had no knowledge of it. And in fact a good number of the characteristics of hysterical paralyses justify this assertion. Hysteria is ignorant of the distribution of the nerves It takes the organs in the ordinary, popular sense of the names they bear: the leg is the leg as far up as its insertion into the hip, the arm is the upper limb as it is visible under the clothing. There is no reason for adding paralysis of the face to paralysis of the arm. A hysteric who cannot talk has no motive for forgetting his understanding of speech, since motor aphasia and word deafness are unrelated to each other in the popular mind, and so on.*⁶⁵

This finding might not have particularly impressed Freud's teachers and colleagues at the time. Writing about his research later, Freud said that Jean-Martin Charcot, his teacher in Paris, "agreed with this view, but in reality it was easy to see that he took no special interest in penetrating more deeply into the psychology of neuroses."⁶⁶ However, the results provided him with a solid medical, i.e., *scientific*, foundation for his later hypotheses.

The starting point, therefore, is that the whole of psychoanalysis—everything: the communications of the analysand, the interventions and interpretations of the analyst, psychoanalytic theories, models, hypotheses and so on—happens within language. Language is necessary and unavoidable for psychoanalysis. Of course, many Freudian and post-Freudian psychoanalytic theories include hypotheses about further phenomena thought to be taking place on a pre-verbal or even an a-verbal level—for example the id, instincts (or drives), anxiety, defences, transference, countertransference and such like.

Lacan, however, never stopped emphasising the fact that regardless of the theoretical models and conceptions that psychoanalysts use and the hypotheses they resort to, the vehicle over which they *are* using them is that of speech, and indeed the field of speaking, a human being (a "subject") speaking to another subject: As he said in 1953, the means of psychoanalysis

⁶³ Jacques Lacan, 'Of Structure as an Inmixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever' [1970] in Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (eds.), *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 186-200, p. 187.

⁶⁴ Ernest Jones, *Sigmund Freud, Life and Work, Vol. 1: The Young Freud, 1856-1900* (London: Hogarth Press, 1980), p. 256.

⁶⁵ Freud, 'Some Points For a Comparative Study of Organic and Hysterical Motor Paralyses', p. 169.

⁶⁶ 'An Autobiographical Study', p. 196.

are those of speech, insofar as speech confers a meaning on the functions of the individual; its domain is that of concrete discourse *qua* field of the subject's transindividual reality; and its operations are those of history, insofar as history constitutes the emergence of truth in reality.⁶⁷

Lacan never ceased returning to this point. He became, however, more and more clear about what *speaking* means. In 1970, he clarifies this:

If you open a book of Freud, and particularly those books which are properly about the unconscious, you can be absolutely sure ... to fall on a page where it is not only a question of words ... but words which are the object through which one seeks for a way to handle the unconscious. Not even the meaning of words, but words in their material aspect.⁶⁸

The importance of this distinction, between the meaning of words and their “material” aspect (i.e., the words in terms of how they sound), was, in Lacan's view, very well known to Freud, as evidenced by his speaking, for example, about *object* presentations in consciousness, consisting of a *thing-presentation* and a *word-presentation*.⁶⁹ But Freud lacked the appropriate linguistic tools to make good and consistent use of the distinction.

Signifiers, signifieds, signs

Lacan drew on the work done in the early 20th century by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who had employed a very similar distinction. Saussure had called sign “the combination of a concept and a sound-image” and proposed “to retain the word sign to designate the whole and to replace concept and sound-image respectively by signified and signifier.”⁷⁰ He described, that is, the words of a language as signifiers, i.e., as entities that can hold a meaning, called signified. For Saussure, every signifier has a signified; and even though their connection is an arbitrary one, it is also stable in the sense that the two are inseparable, which means to say that there is no signifier without a signified. “The two elements are intimately united, and each recalls the other.”⁷¹ Saussure believed that for humans sharing the same language, the most important part of a linguistic sign (i.e., a word) is that of the signified, i.e., the meaning conveyed by the sign to the other human beings sharing the language. All interaction and communication between humans takes place in a field of interconnected and inter-referenced meanings and becomes possible by the exchange of signifiers.

Lacan's insistence on the material aspect of words made him reverse Saussure's schema in order to stress that signifiers rather than signifieds are the most crucial factors in the mental phenomena that Freud discussed: the form of the words—i.e., their material aspect—and *not* their meaning. Thus, in contrast to Saussure, Lacan spoke about the primacy of the signifier over the signified—a

⁶⁷ Lacan, ‘Function and Field’, p. 214/257.

⁶⁸ ‘Of Structure’, p. 187.

⁶⁹ See Freud, ‘The Unconscious’, pp. 206–209.

⁷⁰ Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 67.

⁷¹ *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 66. See also *Course in General Linguistics*, pp. 102–103.

“dominance of the letter”⁷² as he put it—and argued that the unconscious is given a structure by the “letter”.

Structure commits the human libido to the subject, commits it to slipping into the play of words, to being subjugated by the structure of the world of signs, which is the single universal and dominant *Primat*. And the sign, as Peirce put it, is that which is in the place of something else for someone.⁷³

Lacan’s reference here was to Charles Sanders Peirce’s definition of *sign*:

A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign or perhaps a more developed sign. The sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign.⁷⁴

What is interesting in Peirce’s definition is that he sees a sign as a ring in a chain of signs formed by the exchange of signs between their users. Peirce does not have a differentiation equivalent to signifier and signified. What he is interested in is how a sign (qua *representamen*) always brings on another sign (qua *interpretant*); i.e., a sign acts as a *pointer* to another sign. As we shall see below, Lacan’s crucial insight was that the mental phenomena studied by Freud involve processes that can be thought as operating on (Peircean) chains of signifiers (that is, signs) and their interconnections.

Counterintuitive as it might at first seem, this insight—the primacy of the signifier—is compatible with a simple observation about our world: language is a human creation. It is not presented to human beings created by some other, non-human entity; it is the collective product of human interactions, interactions that began hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions of years ago. Human beings have created language, but each and every human infant is born into a linguistic world that is not of his or her making, was there from before and will continue to be there long after any individual’s demise. As Lacan put it,

before strictly human relations are established, certain relations have already been determined. They are taken from whatever nature may offer as supports, supports that are arranged in themes of opposition. Nature provides ... signifiers, and these signifiers organize human relations in a creative way, providing them with structures and shaping them.⁷⁵

This linguistic world is completely unintelligible to the human infant when first immersed in it, since the human infant does not have any means to “know” what the utterances exchanged by his or her carers “mean”, or even that they do “mean” something. The question, that is, is not what the signified, or meaning, of a given signifier is, but whether a meaning is to be expected, whether there *is* meaning as such. Accepting that this indeed is the case, i.e., that *there is meaning*, is an *event* of monumental importance for the human infant, the inaugurating event of becoming a *subject of language*. It has to be pointed out, of course, that I am not talking here about an isolated event as such. To be introduced to language, to acquire a language and learn how to speak, is a lengthy and complicated process that has been studied extensively by disciplines such as developmental psychology, neuropsychology, and

⁷² Lacan, ‘Instance of the Letter’, p. 419/503.

⁷³ *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* [1959-60], ed. Jacques-Allain Miller, trans. Dennis Potter (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 91.

⁷⁴ Peirce, *Philosophical Writings*, p. 99.

⁷⁵ Lacan, *Seminar XI*, p. 20.

linguistics. From a *structural* point of view, however, being introduced to language is more like crossing a threshold, like opening a door, and it is in this sense that I referring to becoming a subject of language as an *event*. This expression, *subject of language*, when used in reference to a human being, is intended to indicate that this human being is a *speaking* human being—i.e., a human being that has already been introduced to language.

Returning to the process of being introduced to language, it can be seen that human beings have no other way to establish in a strict and unambiguous way what the meaning of a given linguistic entity is—i.e., what the signified of a given signifier is—if not by reference to other linguistic entities (signifiers). This can be understood in the literal sense whereby a word can only be defined, explained, clarified, or enriched by reference to other words. This applies even to words whose meaning can be approximated by an act of pointing or showing.

The Lacanian unconscious

In January 1964, during a lecture in *Seminar XI*, Jacques-Alain Miller “questioned [Lacan] as to [his] ontology”.⁷⁶ Lacan wondered a bit and then said:

The gap of the unconscious may be said to be *pre-ontological*. I have stressed that all too often forgotten characteristic ... of the first emergence of the unconscious, namely, that it does not lend itself to ontology. Indeed, what became apparent at first to Freud, to the discoverers, to those who made the first steps, and what still becomes apparent to anyone in analysis who spends some time observing what truly belongs to the order to the unconscious, is that it is neither being, nor non-being, but the unrealized.⁷⁷

As we have seen, the question of the unconscious is indeed one of the most heavily contested in debates about psychoanalysis. Even after having hypothesised about its locus, however, Freud did not really elaborate about the ontological status of this elusive entity. What would it mean to claim that the unconscious *exists*? What type of existence did Freud envisage? The unconscious seems to be a kind of container, not very dissimilar to a memory vault, only its contents are—for some reason or the other—not accessible. Freud tried to reverse-engineer, so to speak, the structure of the unconscious based on the clinical material at his disposal. He postulated different agencies (such as the Ego or the Id), defence mechanisms, instincts (or drives), and so on, but it all was quite obscure, almost inviting confusion and disagreements. Freud remained unabated, being satisfied that he did not need to have answers to all questions while the ideas, concepts, and models were still being worked upon.

Lacan focuses on the original material presented by Freud, and reaches the conclusion that the question should *not* be whether the unconscious—or rather that what belongs to “the order” of the unconscious—exists (or does not exist). For Lacan, Freud discerned the workings of an “unconscious” not in what *was* there, but in what *was not* there. The unconscious was from the beginning conceived as a function, a function that manifests itself as a gap in what would otherwise be a rather ordinary chain of mental events. You see it in a slip of the tongue or memory, in a dream, in a symptom: there

⁷⁶ *Seminar XI*, p. 29. According to M. Marini, Miller’s question was “Does your notion of the subject imply an ontology?” See Marini, *Lacan*, p. 130.

⁷⁷ Lacan, *Seminar XI*, pp. 29–30.

the chain breaks. In this, the unrealised continuity of a chain, you'll find the unconscious. This was an idea that he had expressed before: "The unconscious," he said in 1953, "is that part of concrete discourse qua transindividual, which is not at the subject's disposal in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse."⁷⁸

This discontinuity, what is not at the subject's disposal—i.e., the locus of the unconscious—is not just an empty space, a void, or a gap; it informs and influences everything around it. The gap where the unconscious makes itself known is a *structure*. As Lacan puts it:

A great part of the speculations of Freud is about punning in a dream, or lapsus, or what in French we call calembour, homonymie, or still the division of a word in many parts with each one taking on a new meaning after it is broken down.⁷⁹

Words or names are forgotten, confused, mixed up or replaced, but there is a logic to how this happens, there is a structure. Hence the famous Lacanian motto: "The unconscious is structured like a language."⁸⁰ It is this structure "that assures us that there is, beneath the term unconscious, something definable, accessible and objectifiable".⁸¹ For Lacan, therefore, the unconscious is never seen as an entity that exists as such; it is not even a function or a process, in the same way that consciousness is. The unconscious is the name we give to a *gap* in a chain, and its claim on to the subject to see it, and do something about it, is an ethical claim. Lacan expressed this very clearly: "The status of the unconscious ... so fragile on the ontic plane, is ethical".⁸² What this means is simply that the unconscious invites the subject to make a choice. The choice is whether one will own the meaning carried by this or that manifestation of the unconscious.

Lacan's understanding of the Freudian unconscious is to a large extent compatible with what Freud himself thought. As I argued above, Freud does indeed understand the unconscious as that part of psychical life that is not immediately available to consciousness, and this non-availability can be thought of as a disruption. However, in his attempts to formulate a model of how this non-conscious entity works, Freud might have extended the concept further than Lacan was willing to go, causing him (Lacan) to wonder: "Does this mean that I hope to include the concepts introduced historically by Freud under the term unconscious? No, I don't think so. The unconscious, the Freudian concept, is something different."⁸³

A further notable difference between the two conceptualisations is related to the unconscious in relation to the sources of conflicts. For the early Freud, a symptom was a result of a conflict between an unconscious wish and the demands of the reality principle; however, after the introduction of the Ego, the Id, and the Super-Ego he understood that this was not the whole picture.⁸⁴ Lacan's formulation

⁷⁸ 'Function and Field', p. 214/258.

⁷⁹ 'Of Structure', p. 187.

⁸⁰ *Seminar XI*, p. 20.

⁸¹ *Seminar XI*, p. 21.

⁸² *Seminar XI*, p. 33.

⁸³ *Seminar XI*, p. 21.

⁸⁴ See Freud, 'The Ego and the Id', pp. 356-357.

had moved away from such a view considerably, to the extent that in 1979, he said that the Freudian unconscious was an “admittedly wild story ... quite possibly a Freudian delirium.”⁸⁵

Quilting points

The meanings of most words we use are *given* to us, and we need to conform. But these meanings are not set in stone; they are floating and malleable; they can even change, albeit slowly. To be a subject of language, then, means—among other things—to have constructed a personal network of interconnected signifiers and, parallel to it, a network of interconnected surmised meanings (or signifieds). These interconnected signifiers comprise a chain called the “signifying chain”, a term that, according to Lacan, “gives an approximate idea: links by which a necklace firmly hooks onto a link of another necklace made of links.”⁸⁶ In Lacan’s view, this chain of signifiers—to be more precise, a network of signifiers rather than just a chain—and the network of meanings—i.e., of signifieds—can be thought as parallel to each other in a manner very similar to the one chosen by Saussure to describe the interconnections between “the indefinite plane of jumbled ideas (A) and the equally vague plane of sounds (B)” (Figure 1).

Lacan described the meeting points between the two (i.e., the couplings between some key signifiers and signifiers) as *quilting points* (in French: *points de capiton*),⁸⁷ a term he borrowed from upholstery, in order to create a metaphor to show how the network of signifiers is only loosely attached to the network of meanings. In the normal flow of one’s life events, signifiers are added and meanings shift; their respective networks are in a constant flux and continuously transform themselves—albeit slightly.

Everything radiates out from and is organized around [a key] signifier, similar to these little lines of force that an upholstery button forms on the surface of material. It’s the point of convergence that enables everything that happens in this discourse to be situated retroactively and prospectively.⁸⁸

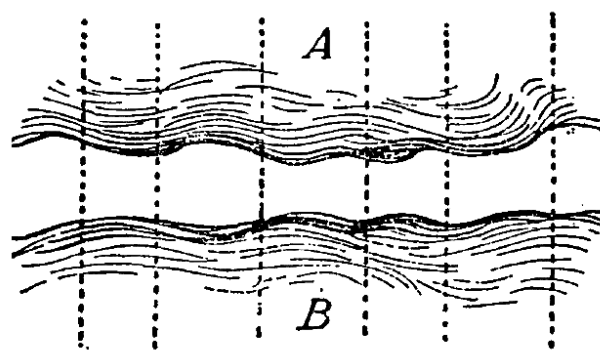


Figure 1: Saussure’s planes of jumbled ideas (A) and sounds (B).

(Source: F.d.Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 112)

⁸⁵ Lacan, quoted in François Roustang, *The Lacanian Delusion*, trans. Greg Sims (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 15.

⁸⁶ Lacan, ‘Instance of the Letter’, pp. 418/501-502.

⁸⁷ Bruce Fink chooses to translate it as *button ties*.

⁸⁸ Lacan, *Seminar III*, p. 268.

The quilting points—i.e., a number of specific key signifiers, different from one person to the other—are less prone to change, and serve as a scaffolding of sorts for the overall structure of this person's psychic space.⁸⁹

In Lacan's view, Freud's discovery was the fact that a person's symptoms are articulated and conform to pathways between key signifiers within that person's mental life. Freud postulated the system *Ucs.* (unconscious) to account for the fact that these dependencies—i.e., pathways of interconnection between signifiers—are unknown (and sometimes unknowable). Freud invented *free association*, a tool that would allow the analysand to map these pathways—which are not pre-given, formed as they are being formed in the frame of one's own individual history—and bring the junctures, or intersections, between signifying chains to light. Free association within the analytic session brings the pathways into the light and allows the analysands to become aware of them and choose what to do with them.

Becoming aware, in this context, refers to enabling the analysand to discern the quilting points that form the scaffolding of their own network of signifiers and to slightly reshuffle the associated network of meanings. Psychoanalysis, then, is a method that allows a person to reformulate their own personal networks of meanings by revealing their interconnections with the underlying network of signifiers. Is it adequate? Lacan, on this point, is very careful. As late as in 1978 he says, in connection with the unconscious: "[If the unconscious is] what one constructs with language, it is a *fraud*: the free association of ideas relies on the haphazard; it is haphazardly that we proceed in order to free someone from what is called the symptom."⁹⁰

Psychoanalysis reveals that what is particular for any given individual qua subject of language lies in the ways the signifiers are connected with one another. It is for this reason that Lacan stresses the primacy of the signifier. "What I call the effect of the signifier", he says in 1970, "does not correspond at all to the signified that linguistics grasps, but well and truly to the subject."⁹¹ In fact, in Lacan's view, the subject is revealed in the way the signifiers are interconnected. "My definition of the signifier (there is no other) is as follows: a signifier is what represents the subject to another signifier."⁹²

There are two questions that can be raised at this point. The first question relates to signifier, as such: What are the minimum features a signifier can have? The other is related to the network of signifiers: If signifiers are interconnected with one another via pathways that relate to (and reflect) an individual's personal history, where is the starting point?

Regarding the first question, Lacan draws from linguistics, where signifiers are distinguished from one another via their minimum differences, or, in Roman Jakobson's terminology, their "distinctive features".⁹³

⁸⁹ For a more extensive discussion in connection to the emergence of signifiers and signification as such see below, pp. 128-133.

⁹⁰ Lacan, quoted in Marini, *Lacan*, p. 248.

⁹¹ Jacques Lacan, 'Préface à l'Édition des Écrits en Livre de Poche' [1970] in J.-A. Miller (ed.), *Autres Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2001), 387-391, p. 390 (my translation).

⁹² 'Subversion of the Subject', pp. 693-694/819.

⁹³ See Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* [1955] (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1980), pp. 31-49.

The structure of the signifier is, as is commonly said of language, that it is articulated. This means that its units ... are subject to the twofold condition of being reduced to ultimate differential elements and of combining the latter according to the laws of a closed order. These elements, the decisive discovery of linguistics, are phonemes; we must not look for any phonetic constancy in the modulatory variability to which this term applies, but rather for the synchronic system of differential couplings that are necessary to discern vocables in a given language.⁹⁴

Signifiers are “diacritical in nature” but never exist on their own; they “always and only [exist] in relation to, and in opposition to, other signifiers.”⁹⁵ In other words, signifiers can be thought of as autonomous entities only within the particular signifying chains to which they belong. In fact, however, a signifier should be considered as a complex entity, comprising parts that might be found (by free association) to be part of different, completely independent signifying chains.⁹⁶

As for the second question, the answer is relatively straightforward. Any chain of signifiers must indeed be thought of as having a starting point, an origin. This cannot but be a signifier as well, one that sets it all “in motion”, so to speak. By convention, this signifier is called a master or unary signifier.⁹⁷ Every other signifier in this specific signifying pathway can, less or more directly, be connected back to its master signifier, but this (local) master signifier cannot be connected back to anything. At the origin of the whole signifying network, then, there is a main master signifier that facilitates—and indeed guarantees—it and whose importance for the individual lies not in its meaning (its signified) but in the fact that it is there. In the words of Bruce Fink, “The subject ... is eclipsed by a master signifier without meaning ... In that sense the master signifier is nonsensical.”⁹⁸

Mirror stage and the subject of language

From what has been outlined until now, it should have become apparent that the Lacanian concept of a *subject* is very different from the common conceptions of a human being as a person or an individual.

⁹⁴ Lacan, ‘Instance of the Letter’, p. 418/501.

⁹⁵ Huguette Glowinski, Zita M. Marks, and Sara Murphy (eds.), *A Compendium of Lacanian Terms* (London: Free Association Books, 2001), pp. 186-187.

⁹⁶ As an illustration of this point we can take the famous “Signorelli” incident. Freud finds himself unable to remember the name of the painter Signorelli while talking with a fellow passenger during a trip in Bosnia & Herzegovina. Instead the names Botticelli and Boltraffio come to his mind. Free associating later on the key signifiers involved, Freud connects Botticelli and Boltraffio with Bosnia. From there he thinks of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the place where this incident took place, and of the appellation Herr which in German means Sir or Lord. This in turn brings to his mind the Italian equivalent of Herr, i.e. Signor, and all its religious connotations; Finally Boltraffio brings to his mind the town of Traffoi, which in turn allows him to recall something professionally embarrassing that happened there. Freud’s explanation was that there was something embarrassing which he’d like to avoid thinking of, and also a reluctance to talk about religious matters in a conversation with someone he did not personally know. Both the embarrassment and the reluctance are reflected in this particular incident: the reluctance to speak about religious matters (“Signor”) having “caused” the replacement of the original name (Signorelli); and the embarrassment (associated with Traffoi) having found its way in the name Boltraffio. We observe that the name Signorelli apart from its ordinary signification—namely, the famous painter bearing this name—becomes, in the specific case of Freud, a compound signifier, comprising two parts, *signor* and *elli*; the first evokes religious questions through the signifier *Herr*, the German translation of *signor*, while the second evokes Botticelli. In his report, Freud does not tell us whether these are the only two signifying chains he can produce in association with the name Signorelli. He reports these two but he might have had a myriad other in his mind. See Freud, ‘The Psychopathology of Everyday Life’, pp. 37-44. Lacan discusses the incident at length in Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud’s Papers on Technique* [1953-54], ed. Jacques-Allain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), pp. 46-48.

⁹⁷ See *Seminar XI*, p. 218. See also below, pp. 128ff.

⁹⁸ Bruce Fink, *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 77.

For Lacan, the human being, qua individual, is subjected to a primordial alienation: language comes from outside it; it presents the human being with a dilemma or demand that cannot be resolved. As Lacan puts it, it's a demand comparable to when someone asks you for "your money or your life."⁹⁹ Indeed, you don't really have a choice, as such. You are subjected to the framework of worldliness that language incorporates; you become a *subject of language*. When a person says "I want this", this "I" serves as the placeholder of the enouncing *subject*. However this enouncing *I* is *not* identical to the speaking being qua subject. To put it differently, even though the terms "subject", "person", "individual", etc., can all refer to the very same human being, they are not equivalent, synonymous, or interchangeable in their respective uses. The Lacanian subject is never considered as synonymous with the human being, as is the case with Descartes. Lacan's take on the Cartesian cogito is radically different from Descartes's own. For Lacan, the subject's existence ("I am") cannot be founded on the subject's reflective certainty ("I am thinking"). "I am thinking where I am not, therefore I am where I am not thinking."¹⁰⁰

According to Lacan, the recognition of the human being's status as a subject of language is at the crux of Freud's discovery. Lacan regarded Freud as the first thinker who could see the human being not as a master in his or her own house, but as a *divided* subject, a subject, that is, who is suffering according to the internal logic of their language—i.e., their own personal network of signifiers.

Of course, Freud did not use terms like these. In his structural model of the mental apparatus, Freud used terms such as the Ego, the Super-Ego and the Id. Freud does, however, speak about a *splitting* of the Ego (in German: *Ichspaltung*) which can be thought of as connected to Lacan's divided (or split) subject.¹⁰¹ The Freudian ego was always thought as a go-between of sorts, an intermediary agency that manages the relations and exchanges between the "individual" and an "external" reality. In classical Freudian theory, the individual human being is not thought of as having been born with an ego; rather, he or she is born with the potential to construct an ego in a process akin to the process of identification, whereby a person takes on or idealises attributes from other important individuals in his or her life.¹⁰² For Freud, the templates par excellence were the parents: the child identifies with them and strives to make his or her own ego similar to the Ideal Ego that he or she assumes they possess.¹⁰³ For Lacan, as for Freud, the infant's ego cannot be thought to even exist prior to this identification process: it is a product of a process, which Lacan called *mirror stage*.

The suggestion of a *mirror stage* was one of Lacan's earlier contributions to psychoanalysis. Having borrowed (and subsequently transformed) the notion from the psychologist Henri Wallon, he first spoke about it in August 1936, at the 14th International Psychoanalytic Congress in Marienbad, and again in 1949, at the 16th International Congress of Psychoanalysis in Zurich.¹⁰⁴ The term refers to a stage of crucial importance in the development of a child, during which the human infant reacts

⁹⁹ Lacan, 'Position of the Unconscious', p. 713/841.

¹⁰⁰ 'Instance of the Letter', p. 430/517. For Lacan and Descartes see also below, pp. 123-126.

¹⁰¹ See Freud, 'Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence'.

¹⁰² See especially the section on Identification in 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego' [1921c], trans. James Strachey, in Angela Richards (ed.), *Civilization, Society and Religion* (Pelican Freud Library, 12; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 95-178, pp. 134-140.

¹⁰³ For an elaboration see 'The Ego and the Id'.

¹⁰⁴ See Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, pp. 110, 195.

jubilantly when faced with the image of him/herself reflected in the mirror. According to Lacan, it all has to do with the biological fact that the human animal is prematurely born. Because of its feebleness and biological immaturity, which, consequently, mean complete dependence on a carer for survival, the human infant enters a stage during which his or her socialisation consists in a series of one-to-one interactions. These revolve around an axis consisting in the form of the human face, facial expressions, visual cues, vocal cues, tactile cues, and the image of the body. As Lacan explains,

His lack of sensory and motor co-ordination does not prevent the new-born baby from being fascinated by the human face, almost as soon as he opens his eyes to the light of day, nor from showing in the clearest possible way that from all the people around him he singles out his mother. It is the stability of the standing posture, the prestige of stature, the impressiveness of statues, which set the style for the identification in which the ego finds its starting-point and leave their imprint in it for ever.¹⁰⁵

According to Lacan it is only through his or her identification with the image of another human being that the infant obtains a sense of self:¹⁰⁶

It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context as an identification, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image—an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase ... This form situates the agency known as the ego, prior to its social determination, in a fictional direction that will forever remain irreducible for any single individual or, rather, that will only asymptotically approach the subject's becoming, no matter how successful the dialectical syntheses by which he must resolve, as I, his discordance with his own reality.¹⁰⁷

The human being is a *subject*, which means he or she is subjected to what comes from outside. The human being's sense of self is an illusory sense, created by a series of identifications and appropriations that form a patchwork identity. For Lacan, this identity is the product of an alienation: "We must absolutely define the ego's imaginary function as the unity of the subject who is alienated from himself. The ego is something in which the subject cannot recognise himself at first except by alienating himself."¹⁰⁸ In the words of John Muller,

subjectivity emerges first of all as intersubjectivity. The transmission of culture operates through the semiotic codes governing the rhythm of touching, gazing, and vocalizing of both mother and infant. The individual emerges in dialogue with another sign-using subject, through a process of mutual recognition and generalization.¹⁰⁹

And, in Lacan's own words, "The subject identifies, in his feeling of Self, with the other's image, and ... the other's image captivates this feeling in him."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Jacques Lacan, 'Some Reflections on the Ego' *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 34 (1953), 11-17, p. 14.

¹⁰⁶ It should be noted that with the mirror stage Lacan was providing his own answer to the "psychological, the psychological, concrete problem of the recognition of the Other" that Sartre had already identified. See Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 248; see also above, p. 31.

¹⁰⁷ Lacan, 'Mirror Stage', p. 76/94.

¹⁰⁸ 'The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real', p. 24.

¹⁰⁹ John P. Muller, *Beyond the Psychoanalytic Dyad: Developmental Semiotics in Freud, Peirce, and Lacan* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 3.

¹¹⁰ Lacan, 'Physical Causality', p. 147/181.

The three registers of experience

As a biological organism, the human being operates and interacts with the world in ways that are determined by the organism's structure and physiology. We need no special understanding of the particular interactions involved when we say that, upon being born, the human being is thrown into the world as "is", i.e., as a biological organism. Indeed, even a simple reference to interactions, biological or other, would imply that a framework of understanding has been already put in place. We would then use notions such as "survival", "species", "environment", "stimulus", "response", etc. For the purposes of what I am trying to describe here, the only extraneous notion I need is that of structure, and the phenomena I refer to can be thought as phenomena pertaining to a coupling between structures, or *structural coupling*. Structural events are occurrences pertaining to structural coupling.¹¹¹

The human being qua biological organism is subject to all the effects of its surrounding environment, effects that leave imprints on the body, in the sense that they affect it: whatever happens in the environment has repercussions on the body's state at any given moment. For example, light falls on the eye and the eye's pupil contracts; or a source of heat will cause a reaction by the nervous system which will be translated to a movement of specific muscles that will result in a movement which will bring a lessening of the excitation, or discomfort, caused by the heat.

Talking generally, the world qua environment in which the organism is immersed is the source of all kinds of structural changes to the organism. The pre-verbal human infant who is thrown in the world is receiving all these structural events and has no agency for processing them. In other words, the world has effects on the body, it is the source of structural events for the body, and the infant cannot but experience them.

Developing further the hypothesis of a mirror stage, and recognising that all the early identifications and early relations of an infant with their parents or carers that the mirror stage pertains to share a connection with image, in the sense of an actual or a mental picture, Lacan put forward the suggestion that they constitute a special register in the organisation of the psyche. He called it the *imaginary*, choosing the term carefully to play on the linguistic connection of the words *image* and *imagination*, and stressing its connection to an image, and the transformation "that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image."¹¹² The very decision to describe the imaginary as a register, rather than an agency or a function, could be thought of as reflecting Lacan's insight that it involves a certain temporal constancy, and the emergence of increasingly complicated structures.

As an illustration of this point, one could look a bit more closely at the process of identification. It is not possible to speak about identification unless there is something, an original entity that can be discerned and identified with. Furthermore, an identification that has taken place itself entails a more or less sustained alteration of a certain balance. If an entity is identified with another entity, either as

¹¹¹ The term *structural coupling* has been introduced by the Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, and defined as "a phenomenon that takes place whenever a plastic composite unity undergoes recurrent interactions with structural change but without loss of organization, which may follow any changing or recurrent structural configuration of its domain of interactions (medium)." Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980), p. xxi. See also Humberto R. Maturana, *Biologie der Realität*, trans. Wolfram Karl Köck (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), pp. 104-105.

¹¹² Lacan, 'Mirror Stage', p. 76/94.

a whole, or in any of its specific aspects, this can only mean that the latter can stand as a “pointer” to the former, either as a whole or in that specific aspect, and a structure is formed—a dynamic, fluid structure. We can understand this process in terms of Peirce’s theory of the sign. The pointer can be thought of as a representamen; what is pointed to as an interpretant. Both the “pointer”, as well as what is “pointed to”, can change in time, some of them more readily than others. Importantly, identification, as a process, is less primordial than the process of “becoming a pointer to”.

We can see, then, that being inscribed to the imaginary register is a structuring process, by which a second register emerges out of the imaginary, one that contains the more solidly structured elements of the imaginary, and the ways in which they act as pointers to each other. As Lacan explains, “imaginary effects, far from representing the core of analytic experience, give us nothing of any consistency unless they are related to the symbolic chain that binds and orients them.”¹¹³ This second register is the register of the symbolic, a register *retroactively* constructed out of elements of the imaginary that exhibit a temporal persistence and start acting as pointers to other elements of the imaginary that also exhibit a temporal persistence—a “subset” of the imaginary, if we may call it thus.¹¹⁴

The creation of the symbolic register is spontaneous but not instantaneous. It’s a structuring process that may be exemplified in the process of the acquisition of language—also spontaneous but not instantaneous—but is not limited to it. One could say that language is a specific subset of the symbolic register. The symbolic comprises “signifiers”, interconnected in a signifying chain or network. In other words, it initially contains those elements of the imaginary that are taken by the human being to represent something to him or her, i.e., as signs in the Peircian sense. What is being represented, how a given sign is being “interpreted”—namely, its meaning—is initially private. The human infant has his or her own signifiers and invents his or her own significations in the course of time.

Now, if the imaginary register is that what the infant can construct out of his or her experience via the help of the image of (an) Other—I am referring here to the mirror stage—and if the symbolic register is a subset of the imaginary that comes about when the human being enters “the significative system of interhuman relations as such,”¹¹⁵ then the question may be raised regarding their origins. This is where we can locate the third register that Lacan postulated, that of the *real*.

The real, in accordance with what has been described heretofore, can be defined as the register of all the structural events pertaining to the body—in effect, a register of how reality is received by the individual human being in question. For example, an unexpected loud bang on our door in the night might be thought of as *real* in terms of waveforms and decibels, but it can only be part of *our* real insofar as it wakes us up. It becomes part of our own *world* (or *reality*) the moment we are drawn to account for it (e.g., “There was a loud bang. Someone must be at the door”). In a similar vein, an

¹¹³ “The Purloined Letter”, p. 6/11.

¹¹⁴ I am using the term “subset” in a figurative rather than a strict mathematical sense. Admittedly I am twisting it somehow. Its applicability is limited: The symbolic can be said to be a subset of the imaginary only to the extent that it comprises temporarily persistent elements of the latter which become pointers, i.e. become signifiers. It can be thought, nevertheless, as much more extensive than the imaginary since it also contains chains, or networks of interconnected signifiers. See below, pp. 121-123. For a similar use of “subset” cf. Gerald Hall, ‘The Logical Typing of the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real’ in Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), 274-277.

¹¹⁵ Lacan, ‘The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real’, p. 27.

unexpected bodily discomfort, such as a sharp ache in the arm, is part of *our* real, and can become a part of our *reality* when overlaid by a framework of explanations that would allow us to include it. It is in exactly this sense that Marcelle Marini writes that “language, the signifier, the letter, logic, the phallus, the Name-of-the-Father, etc., all become superimposed on the real and send it back to the position of the inaccessible.”¹¹⁶

Real and reality

The three registers of experience were presented here as if they had been introduced in stages; however, this was not exactly the case. Lacan first spoke about all of them, simultaneously, in his seminar of 8 July 1953, as “the three quite distinct registers that are essential registers of human reality.”¹¹⁷ Their conceptual origins, however, can be traced further back, albeit partially: As François Roustang notes, “if it can be definitely stated that the imaginary dates from 1936, and the symbolic from 1953, it could not be said outright that the real, given its name in 1953, actually came into its own from 1964 on.”¹¹⁸ Roustang—a former student of Lacan who became one of his more severe critics—accuses Lacan of being deliberately obscure and incoherent, and, specifically in connection with the concept of the real, of introducing a contradictory term that “simply does not exist ... or it simply does not exist as a concept, since it can go on drifting in all directions.”¹¹⁹

It might be true that, at least in the beginning, Lacan used the term “real” almost interchangeably with the term “reality”. Gradually the differentiation between the two became more unambiguous and more pronounced and the importance of the real grew from the 1960s onwards. According to Tom Eyers the real has been “the central, determining concept of Lacan’s work, early and late”. Eyers argues that “every stage of his [Lacan’s] theoretical development can be understood as an attempt to delineate more precisely the real as the object particular to psychoanalytic inquiry.”¹²⁰ Lorenzo Chiesa, on the other hand, has pointed out that Lacan’s first attempts to openly tackle the notion of the real can be found in *Seminar VII* (1959–1960). According to Chiesa, in his early work Lacan had associated the real

with both (1) objects as they are given to us in everyday reality; and (2) a rather vague notion of undifferentiated matter as it is in itself before the advent of the symbolic—or beyond the latter’s domain. ... This inevitably gives rise to blatant contradictions insofar as the superimposition of the Symbolic onto the Imaginary is, according to Lacan, precisely what accounts for the filtering of our perception of everyday reality. Furthermore ... the term ‘real’ is also understood in a third sense as a nonsymbolized Symbolic which should be located within language.¹²¹

In my view the registers of the imaginary and the symbolic would be completely unfounded if the real had not been already tacitly postulated as the necessary background from which they emerge.

¹¹⁶ Marini, *Lacan*, p. 72.

¹¹⁷ Lacan, ‘The Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real’, p. 4.

¹¹⁸ Roustang, *The Lacanian Delusion*, p. 59.

¹¹⁹ *The Lacanian Delusion*, pp. 101–102.

¹²⁰ Tom Eyers, *Lacan and the Concept of the ‘Real’* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 1, 2. See also “The Real” in Glowinski, Marks, and Murphy (eds.), *A Compendium of Lacanian Terms*, pp. 154–155.

¹²¹ Lorenzo Chiesa, *Subjectivity and Otherness* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2007), p. 126.

As I wrote above, the *real* can be defined as the register of all the structural events pertaining to the body; in effect, the *real* can be thought of as the register of how reality—the term “reality” is used here in the sense of both worldly and bodily reality—is received by the individual human being in question.¹²² Seen in this way, the concept of the real can show its coherence in a way that would otherwise be impossible to achieve if one were to try to make sense of all of Lacan’s different attempts to elucidate it directly, from the ground up, so to speak. In other words, I am employing here a *circle of understanding* not very dissimilar (but not identical) to the one that Heidegger considers indispensable to philosophical thinking. What I mean is that in my view we cannot have a clear understanding of what Lacan says in order to introduce the real unless we have a prior conception of what the real *might* be. There lies the reason for contradictions and incoherencies that commentators like Roustang observe.

Lacan thought of the real as something that is gradually being replaced, so to speak, by the imaginary and the symbolic—as the raw material out of which the imaginary and the symbolic are constructed, or the core that remains.¹²³ Nonetheless, the real can never be fully taken over by the imaginary and symbolic registers, and it is in this sense that we see Bruce Fink writing that “the real is perhaps best understood as *that which has not yet been symbolised*, remains to be symbolised, or even resists symbolisation.”¹²⁴ Rather than just a background against which the other two registers emerge, it is really a scaffolding framework—the most basic register of the psychic imprint of structural events involving the living body in its domain of interactions.¹²⁵ It is in this that its fundamental difference from what we ordinarily call reality lies. “I am saying the real and not reality,” Lacan explains in 1959, “because reality is constituted by all the halts that human symbolism, in a more or less

¹²² In an earlier paper of mine I had described the body as “an ‘organ’ that comes into contact with the real, or rather is immersed in the real”, and had explained that “through the body the real produces an effect”. Christos Tombras, ‘On Being Human: An Attempt at Epistemology’ *Journal of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research*, 16 (2005), 81-101, p. 87. I no longer stand by this description, as it leaves room for confusing the real qua register (of effects) with the real qua source of effects. However, I did argue then, as I am arguing here, that the imaginary and the symbolic emerge out of the real. See ‘On Being Human’, p. 99n17.

¹²³ To bring just one example, in lesson VII of Seminar I, where Lacan speaks about the “original chaos” of the real, out of which the (imaginary) Ego may be born, and the position of the (symbolic) subject may be secured. See Lacan, *Seminar I*, pp. 73-88. Lacan returns to the question repeatedly until towards the end of his teaching. As late as in 1976 he refers to the real as “a core around which thought embellishes”. As he points out, “the mark as such of this real is that it doesn’t tie on to anything. This at least is how I conceive the real.” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII: The Sinthome* [1975-76], ed. Jacques-Allain Miller, trans. A. R. Price (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), p. 104.

¹²⁴ Fink, *Lacanian Subject*, p. 25.

¹²⁵ Slavoj Žižek has suggested a rereading of the concept of the real, claiming “that there are at least three notions” of it; he argues that “the very triad of real, symbolic and imaginary is in a way mapped onto or projected into the real itself” producing “[a] real Real, [an] imaginary Real and [a] symbolic Real”; he even extends this idea further to the other registers, describing the knotting between the real, imaginary and symbolic as a three-dimensional configuration, with “each of these categories ... mapped onto all the others. ... [They] are really intertwined in a radical sense; like a crystal structure in which the different elements are mapped onto and repeat themselves within each category.” Slavoj Žižek and Glyn Daly, *Conversation with Žižek* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), pp. 68, 69. See also Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 82. In total, Žižek envisages nine different variations of the three registers, a combination of each one with each and every one. The idea is appealing, perhaps because of its internal symmetry, but apart from this I cannot see its usefulness. In my view the main purpose behind Lacan’s differentiation between the three registers was to enable three things: the structural modelling of the processes that are taking place in the human psyche as a result of the immersion of the body in the world (on which I will expand below), the construction of an imaginary identity (mirror stage), and the subjection to language. In other words, Lacan’s purpose was predominantly clinical. It is difficult to see the clinical relevance of Žižek’s innovation. I find it problematic and unnecessary.

perspicacious fashion, passes around the neck of the real in so far as it makes of them the objects of its experience.”¹²⁶

Jouissance, the body, the world

With the real conceived of as the register of all the structural events pertaining to the body, Lacan employs an additional term to denote these events in reference to the experience of the human being involved. This term is “jouissance”. It comes from the French verb *jouir*, “enjoy”, and, indeed, it is sometimes translated as enjoyment.¹²⁷ Its scope is much broader in comparison to its English rendering, though, and for this reason the term is usually left untranslated.

Lacan first introduced jouissance in *Seminar V*, where he contrasted it with desire and presented, as its origin:

That which maintains the originality which conditions the desire of man, [that which] represents for him this something which is always for you more or less implicated in the way you handle this notion of desire and which deserves to be distinguished from it. ... It is called *jouissance*.¹²⁸

Lacan returned to it again and again, modifying it ever so slightly as he considers it in terms of the clinic and elaborates its interconnections with the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real.¹²⁹ In 1970 he speaks of the human being as a subject of jouissance: “this fathomless thing, capable of experiencing something between birth and death, capable of covering the whole spectrum of pain and pleasure, in a word what in French we call the *sujet de la jouissance*.”¹³⁰

The concept of jouissance can be approached from several different angles, but the most straightforward one would be to consider it at the level of the real. Taken as such, the term could be thought of as representing the events pertaining to the various types of structural coupling of the body in the world. Whatever happens to the body gives rise to specific bodily effects, many of which are registered in the real. *Jouissance* (of the body) is the name one can give to such effects.¹³¹ In other

¹²⁶ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI: Desire and its Interpretation* [1958-59], trans. Cormac Gallagher (Unauthorised translation from unpublished manuscript: www.lacaninireland.com), p. 342 (translation slightly modified).

¹²⁷ It was in this sense that Lacan first used the term (see, for example, ‘Function and Field’, p. 208/250), but gradually he allowed the scope of the term to change. According to N. Braunstein, the confusion of jouissance with satisfaction that can sometimes be observed, can be traced to the confusing subtitle given to a subsection of a particular lesson in *Seminar VII* (see *Seminar VII*, p. 205). See Néstor A. Braunstein, ‘Desire and Jouissance in the Teachings of Lacan’, trans. Tamara Francés, in Jean-Michel Rabaté (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 102-115, pp. 104-105.

¹²⁸ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V: The Formations of the Unconscious* [1957-58], trans. Cormac Gallagher (Unauthorised translation from unpublished manuscript: www.lacaninireland.com), p. 181.

¹²⁹ Jacques-Allain Miller has identified six different “paradigms” in Lacan’s treatment of the concept of jouissance. They follow one another and replace each other more or less chronologically. See Jacques-Allain Miller, ‘Les six Paradigmes de la Jouissance’ *La Cause Freudienne* 43(1999); <<http://www.causefreudienne.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/JAM-Six-paradigmes-jouissance.pdf>>, accessed 12 Dec. 2015 ; see also above, p. 87n14.

¹³⁰ Lacan, ‘Of Structure’, p. 194 (punctuation slightly altered).

¹³¹ My reading of the concept of jouissance follows my understanding of Lacan’s own elaboration in 1972-73. See for example the points where he describes “the jouissance of the body ... as asexual” and explains that he identifies “the reason for the being of signifierness in jouissance, jouissance of the body” (*The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX: Encore. On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge* [1972-73], ed. Jacques-Allain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), pp. 6, 71). See also J.A. Miller’s

words, if the real is the register of all bodily structural events, jouissance can be seen as that which is registered—the *value*, so to speak, of these events for the individual involved.¹³² An event of the body is not just the outcome of the functioning of the body qua biological organism in structural coupling; it is not to be confused with the stimuli that the body receives and processes. It's rather a concurrence of specific bodily states that can be distinguished as such—i.e., as specific—either at the moment of occurrence or retroactively.

The concept of jouissance can be thought as something vaguely related to the concept of libido, on the one hand, and, on the other, to the stimuli that the human body as a biological organism receives from both the environment as well as from within itself. Both terms, “libido” and “stimulus”, are used here in a Freudian sense. Freud speaks about the task of the nervous system, which is to master external and internal stimuli,¹³³ or about how libido is cathected onto “people or things in the external world” or to “others in phantasy.”¹³⁴ We could account for both phenomena with the assistance of the term “jouissance”. However, there is a notable difference. Jouissance, by definition, is more basic, more primordial than the other two. This is to say that jouissance is pre-linguistic, or in fact non-linguistic, since, as we defined it earlier, it is only connected to the register of the real. This is meant in the sense that jouissance is an effect of the body. However, there is an equally notable similarity with Freud's libido, namely its *energistic* aspect. Speaking in 1966, Lacan is quite clear on this:

What I call jouissance—in the sense in which the body experiences itself—is always in the nature of a tension, in the nature of a forcing, of a spending, even of an exploit. Unquestionably, there is jouissance at the level at which pain begins to appear, and we know that it is only at this level of pain that a whole dimension of the organism, which would otherwise remain veiled, can be experienced.¹³⁵

Just as libido can be *cathected*, transformed, regressed or repressed, jouissance also is thought to undergo transformations, to be linked to specific parts of the body (e.g., *phallic* jouissance), and to be differentiated according to gender (e.g., *feminine* or *other* jouissance).¹³⁶

The most important aspect of jouissance, “important” in terms of its contribution to the overall Lacanian theory, is its connection to the signifier and to the signifying process. As we described earlier, some parts of the real become somewhat more stable through a process of retroactive identifications—a process whose pivotal stage is the mirror stage—which leads to the construction of the imaginary and symbolic registers. Putting jouissance in the picture, we can see that the process corresponds to a *binding*, *moulding* or *crystallisation* of jouissance. Both the imaginary and the symbolic can be thought as crystallised, signifierised or *cadaverised* jouissance—cadaverised in the sense that it is turned into a cadaver, a corpse.¹³⁷ As Lacan had said before, “the symbol first manifests

commentary on Lacan's “six paradigms” of jouissance, in which he explains how in Seminar XX Lacan presents language and structure as secondary and derivative of jouissance and *lalangue* (Miller, ‘Six Paradigmes’, pp. 21–22).

¹³² This is linked to Lacan's referring to the symptom as an “event of the body”. See Lacan, ‘Joyce le Symptôme’, p. 569.

¹³³ See Freud, ‘Instincts and their Vicissitudes’, p. 116.

¹³⁴ ‘On Narcissism’, p. 66.

¹³⁵ Lacan, quoted in Braunstein, ‘Desire and Jouissance’, p. 103.

¹³⁶ For a discussion of phallic and other jouissance see below, pp. 147–150.

¹³⁷ See Lacan, ‘Radiophonie’, p. 409.

itself as the killing of the thing, and this death results in the endless perpetuation of the subject's desire."¹³⁸

To use a more concrete example, one can take the case of a newborn infant. Feeding, be it from the breast or from a bottle, is clearly an important procedure for the infant—if only in terms of biological sustenance. However, the baby has no control over it and is completely “at the mercy” of its carer. During un-signified actual feeding, the human infant can be expected to experience all kinds of things, some pleasurable, some (perhaps) not. The exact details of what the baby experiences cannot be known. What is crucial here is that all these events *are* jouissance. Now, this procedure is repeated, more or less regularly. The baby becomes conditioned to expect to be fed more or less regularly, and learns to associate this event with other events—for example, the appearance of a friendly face and certain sounds. It learns to associate these events to a certain jouissance; a certain jouissance accompanies these events and becomes linked or “bound” to them.

The similarity of this process to the process, described by Freud, of the investment or cathexis of libido upon objects is not coincidental. In contrast to Freud's libido theory, however, whereby libido can be invested upon, or withdrawn from, objects,¹³⁹ Lacan's signified jouissance is taken out of circulation, so to speak. Binding—or signification—of jouissance is accompanied by the emergence of the imaginary and symbolic registers. Signification, as such, brings a kind of order to the jouissance of the body: The world is much safer when its effects on the body (i.e., jouissance) can be incorporated into a network of signifiers.

In a sense, human beings, in their dealings with the world, create more and complex networks of interconnected signified jouissance within which they dwell. The subject of language and the world it lives in are “products” of the signification process. It is, in Lacan's words, “this emergence which, just before, as subject, was nothing, but which, having scarcely appeared, solidifies into a signifier.”¹⁴⁰ In this connection, Rik Loose writes:

The moment the organism becomes a body is also the moment the signifiers of the demand of the Other begin to push the jouissance of the real body into the anatomical rims and sexual objects outside the body. Language ‘phallicises’ the body by transforming this real jouissance into a sexual or phallic jouissance which is situated outside the body.¹⁴¹

The world that the subject of language inhabits is a world revealed and guaranteed by the symbolic order and the signifier. It is a shared world, in the sense that each and every one of us is subjected to a symbolic order which was established beforehand; but it is also a private world in the

¹³⁸ ‘Function and Field’, p. 262/319. Lacan's conceptualisation of signification as the killing of the thing was inspired by A. Kojève's commentary on Hegel. “For example”, Kojève writes, “as long as the Meaning (or Essence) ‘dog’ is embodied in a sensible entity, this Meaning (Essence) *lives*: it is the real dog, the living dog which runs, drinks, and eats. But when the Meaning (Essence) ‘dog’ passes in to the word ‘dog’ ... the Meaning (Essence) *dies*: the word ‘dog’ does not run, drink, and eat; in it the Meaning (Essence) *ceases* to live—that is, it *dies*. And that is why the conceptual understanding of empirical reality is equivalent to a *murder*”. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Jr. James H. Nichols (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 140.

¹³⁹ For Freud's libido theory see indicatively Sigmund Freud, ‘Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality’ [1905d], trans. James Strachey, in Angela Richards (ed.), *On Sexuality* (Pelican Freud Library, 7; Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 33-169, pp. 138-140.

¹⁴⁰ Lacan, *Seminar XI*, p. 199.

¹⁴¹ Rik Loose, *The Subject of Addiction: Psychoanalysis and the Administration of Enjoyment* (London: Karnac, 2002), p. 183. For Lacan's notion of the *phallus* and its connection to signification see below, pp. 128-131.

sense that each and every one of us, as a subject, is adding his or her own panoply of signifiers and retroactively creating his or her own network of meanings.¹⁴² In other words, for Lacan, our own private world is never completely private and our own, but also never completely shared and public.¹⁴³ There is a tension between what is private and what is shared that resembles the tension between authenticity and inauthenticity in Heidegger. Jacques-Alain Miller has pointed out that for Lacan “the exterior is present in the interior. The most interior ... has, in the analytic experience, a quality of exteriority.”¹⁴⁴ Lacan tried to represent this tension with the help of mathematical entities such as the Möbius strip or the Klein bottle. As Kazushige Shingu explains,

as a first approximation, we can say that that which is said in psychoanalysis is spoken *within* the subject who is doing the talking. It seems, therefore, as though a boundary exists between these things and the external, social life that the subject experiences from day to day. But in fact, the unconscious, which seems so clearly to be a place hidden within this internal discourse, is also a kind of secret passage leading back to the outside world. By slipping out through this passage, the subject manages to see herself from the outside, and gains the ability to speak of herself. The unconscious is thus structured like a Möbius strip; if you follow the inside to its very end, you find yourself on the outside.¹⁴⁵

Anxiety, Desire and object *a*

This process of signifierisation of *jouissance* is never complete. There is always a part of *jouissance* that remains unbound, i.e., un-signifierised. This *jouissance* is experienced ‘as’ something that does not really belong in the subject’s world, as out-worldly. It is indeed out-worldly in the sense that, as we said earlier, a world is only constituted via the installation of the signifier. These leftovers of *jouissance* cause the human being to *oscillate*, so to speak, between meaning and anxiety. A way to understand anxiety, then, is to see it as the generic name we can give to all *jouissance* that does not quite fit in a network of signifiers. Obviously, in accordance with what we have already said, *jouissance* always begins like this.¹⁴⁶

Any event of the body and its associated *jouissance* can be a potential signifier. It becomes a signifier when it obtains the character of a pointer to another signifier, i.e., when it becomes part of a network of interconnected elements. Until this happens, an event of the body is just unsignifierised *jouissance*—a “trauma”, so to speak, or a source of anxiety or tension. Sometimes a tension is

¹⁴² I have presented and elaborated this distinction between a private and a public, i.e., shared, web of signifiers in Tombras, ‘Kicking Down the Ladder’, pp. 125–126. It is important to note, however, that the distinction has some usefulness only when one considers the structure of psychic life from a distance, *macroscopically* so to speak. When one looks closer at the phenomena the distinction is rendered irrelevant. As J. A. Miller has argued, for Lacan it was important to escape “the common ravings about a psychism supposedly located in a bipartition between interior and exterior.” Miller, ‘Extimité’, p. 75. See also below, p. 143.

¹⁴³ The argument here is similar to Wittgenstein’s *Private Language argument*. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* [1945], trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), §244–271.

¹⁴⁴ Miller, ‘Extimité’, p. 76.

¹⁴⁵ Kazushige Shingu, *Being Irrational: Lacan, the Object *a*, and the Golden Mean* [1995], trans. Machael Radich (Tokyo: Gakuji Shoin, 2004), p. 159.

¹⁴⁶ Jacques-Alain Miller describes this aspect of *jouissance* as *jouissance One*, stressing that at the beginning at least, it can do without the other. See Miller, ‘Six Paradigmes’, p. 25.

discharged, and in this respect the event can be experienced as pleasurable.¹⁴⁷ It's only after the installation of the signifier that the human being can really consider this or that influx of *jouissance* as pleasure: an event is not pleasurable or unpleasurable on its own. It only becomes such when considered within the network of interconnected signifiers that constitute the experience of this particular human being. In other words, there is nothing in *jouissance* that would allow an observer to predict whether this or that event of the body will be thought of as pleasant or unpleasant by the subject. Something that might be very pleasant for one might be considered as unpleasant or completely unwelcome by the other. And vice versa. And it is perhaps in this way that we can structurally understand behaviours such as masochism. What is pleasant or unpleasant is not so self-evident or clear for the speaking being. It's not a question of something that can be "objectively" measured or understood. Among the members of a community, of course, some common ground can be thought to exist, reflecting that part of each member's world that is shared. This is less and less the case when we examine different or distant cultural communities.

As described earlier, a side effect of the process of signifierisation is that the signifierised *jouissance* is removed from circulation. This *jouissance* is "deactivated", so to speak. Where once there was an effect because of a body event, there is now a signifier as a pointer to it; the actual effect (i.e., the *jouissance* of the body event) is now missing. The pointer does not really replace the missing *jouissance*, i.e., it does not create a similar effect—or *any* effect, for that matter. A direct outcome of this is the emergence of desire—i.e., the desire to return to the original *jouissance*, which is actually not there anymore.

It has to be stressed that the term "desire" is used here in an ontological rather than an ontic sense, i.e., without any reference to *what* is desired, what it *means* to desire, or how desire is articulated. This is what Lacan points out: "This is why desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting".¹⁴⁸

Lacan summarises as follows:

The unconscious does not exist because there would be an unconscious desire ... that would be primitive and that would have to elevate itself to the superior level of the conscious. On the contrary, there is a desire because there is unconscious, that is to say language which escapes the subject in its structure and effects, and because there is always on the level of language something beyond consciousness, which is where the function of desire can be situated.¹⁴⁹

At the heart of the subject of language is a lack. When a signifier is established, when *jouissance* is made into signifiers, there is always something left over. Some *jouissance* that has not yet been signifierised. There are events of the body (which are already registered in the real) that have not been included in the network of signifiers: anxiety, for example; or orgasm. Lacan has given to this remainder

¹⁴⁷ Compare, here, Freud's attempt to speak about the origins of the pleasure principle. He outlined it in terms of mounting or discharging a tension resulting from a stimulus: "Unpleasurable feelings are connected with an increase and pleasurable feelings with a decrease of stimulus". Freud, 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes', p. 117.

¹⁴⁸ Lacan, 'Signification of the Phallus', p. 580/691.

¹⁴⁹ Lacan in 1966, quoted in Dany Nobus, 'A Matter of Cause: Reflection on Lacan's "Science and Truth"' in Jason Glynnos and Yannis Stavrakakis (eds.), *Lacan & Science* (London: Karnac, 2002), 89-118, p. 103.

jouissance the designation “*a*”—which, now, as *object a*, becomes a reference to this remainder jouissance:

That is to say that [object *a*], the object of desire, in its nature is a residue, is a remainder. It is the residue which the being with which the speaking subject is confronted as such leaves to any possible demand. And this is the way that the object re-joins the real. This is how it participates in it.¹⁵⁰

Admittedly, object *a* is one of those Lacanian concepts that seem to be too difficult to pin down. According to Bruce Fink, Lacan considered it to be one of his most significant contributions to psychoanalysis.¹⁵¹ Its conceptual origin can be found in Karl Abraham’s conception of the part object, and in Winnicott’s transitional object; it reflected Lacan’s distinction between an object which is desired and an object that *causes* desire to emerge.¹⁵² In the words of Lacan, “Object *a* is a function I invented in order to designate the object of desire. Small *a* is what Winnicott calls the transitional object.”¹⁵³ The *fuel* for this function—if I can use this expression—comes from the remainder (not yet signified) jouissance, which in a way becomes a *surplus* jouissance (in French: *plus-de-jouir*). As Nestor Braunstein explains,

‘Satisfaction’ (of the need and of the demand) always leaves a trace of disappointment: there is something missing in the object that the other offers. ... It is this unsatisfied remainder of ‘satisfaction’ that engenders an object: the object cause of desire, the object of a surplus of jouissance and, at the same time, a lost jouissance (*plus-de-jouir*) which Lacan calls *objet a*.¹⁵⁴

Drives

One of Freud’s most easily misunderstood concepts is *drive*. Freud’s German term was *Trieb*, which was originally translated as *instinct*—a choice that gave rise to some confusion.¹⁵⁵ The meaning Freud gave to the term was that of a motivating force or factor that would account for the observation that living creatures seem to be compelled to behave in a certain ways. He described drives

as a concept on the frontier between the mental and the somatic, as the psychical representative of the stimuli originating from within the organism and reaching the mind, as a measure of the demand made upon the mind for work in consequence of its connection with the body.¹⁵⁶

Freud differentiated between two major groups of drives, the ones that have something to do with “life” (or Eros) and the ones that have something to do with “death” (or Thanatos). He speculated

¹⁵⁰ Lacan, *Seminar VI*, pp. 341–342. For a similar argument see Tombras, ‘On Being Human’, pp. 90, 99n19.

¹⁵¹ See Fink, *Lacanian Subject*, p. 83.

¹⁵² See *Lacanian Subject*, pp. 83–97. For an extensive, book-length discussion of *object a* see Shingu, *Being Irrational*.

¹⁵³ Jacques Lacan, ‘At the *Institut français* in London (3 Feb. 1975)’ [1975], trans. Dany Nobus, *Journal for Lacanian Studies*, 3/2 (2005), 295–303, p. 301.

¹⁵⁴ Braunstein, ‘Desire and Jouissance’, p. 110.

¹⁵⁵ J. Strachey, Freud’s main translator defended this choice and argued against the term *drive*. He noted the similarity between *Trieb* and *drive* is superficial, and that in the literature and dictionaries there was no use of the word “drive” in the sense that Freud used the term “*Trieb*”. See James Strachey, ‘Notes on Some Technical Terms whose Translation calls for Comment’ in Sigmund Freud, *Pre-Psycho-Analytic Publications and Unpublished Drafts* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), xxxiii–xxvi.

¹⁵⁶ Freud, ‘Instincts and their Vicissitudes’, p. 118.

that they reflect a deeper state of affairs within the universe. The life drive refers to the tendency of certain processes to create more and more complicated structures, such as life itself; and the death drive refers to processes that undo or counteract the first.

Having until then considered the pleasure principle to be the main driving force behind any human (and animal) action, Freud introduced the death drive in order to account for some clinical phenomena that could not fit with it. The aim of the pleasure principle was thought to be the reduction of tension “by the shortest route possible”.¹⁵⁷ However, there were unaccountable phenomena, all falling under the rubric of a “compulsion to repeat”, that did not seem to conform to it—for instance, “the transference phenomena of neurotics”, “the dreams which occur in traumatic neuroses”, and “the impulse which leads children to play”.¹⁵⁸ Melanie Klein embraced the concept of the death drive almost immediately because she saw that it could solve her greatest theoretical problem in relation to what she thought were very early manifestations of the Superego.¹⁵⁹ Other psychoanalysts, however, were less convinced. The concept of the death drive remains the subject of debate.

Freud himself writes that

the theory of the instincts is so to say our mythology. Instincts are mythical entities, magnificent in their indefiniteness. In our work we cannot for a moment disregard them, yet we are never sure that we are seeing them clearly. You know how popular thinking deals with the instincts. People assume as many and as various instincts as they happen to need at the moment—a self-assertive instinct, an imitative instinct, an instinct of play, a gregarious instinct and many others like them. People take them up, as it were, make each of them do its particular job, and then drop them again. We have always been moved by a suspicion that behind all these little *ad hoc* instincts there lay concealed something serious and powerful which we should like to approach cautiously.¹⁶⁰

As Jonathan Lear comments, the death drive might reflect Freud’s “failure to understand the significance of compulsive repetition” and “raises the question of how we understand the phenomenon of human aggression.”¹⁶¹

For his part, Lacan too suggested from the beginning that many mental phenomena that involved some form of aggression and were thought to be attributable to a death drive were instead indirect products of the process of construction of the imaginary via the mirror stage.¹⁶²

Returning to this issue in *Seminar XI*, he tried to combine the two drives into one:

In this way I explain the essential affinity of every drive with the zone of death, and reconcile the two sides of the drive—which, at one and the same time, makes present sexuality in the unconscious and represents, in its essence, death.¹⁶³

And also, further down in the text:

¹⁵⁷ Skelton (ed.), *Edinburgh Encyclopaedia*, p. 369.

¹⁵⁸ See Freud, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, pp. 292–294.

¹⁵⁹ See “Death Instinct” in Robert D. Hinshelwood, *A Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), pp. 266–270.

¹⁶⁰ Freud, ‘New Introductory Lectures’, pp. 127–128.

¹⁶¹ Lear, *Freud*, p. 163.

¹⁶² See Lacan, ‘Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis’.

¹⁶³ *Seminar XI*, p. 199.

The distinction between the life drive and the death drive is true in as much as it manifests two aspects of the drive. But this is so only on condition that one sees all the sexual drives as articulated at the level of significations in the unconscious, in as much as what they bring out is death—death as signifier and nothing but signifier, for can it be said that there is a being-for death?¹⁶⁴

In other words, Lacan would locate death at the level of the signifier, since, as we saw above, it is the signifier which deadens or *cadaverises* jouissance.¹⁶⁵

There is a crucial similarity in how the drives are conceived of in Freud and Lacan, namely that they are thought as some kind of background motivating factors. In Freud, they are conceived of as being like force field that change anything that falls within their scope of influence, while for Lacan they are more like *vectors* that connect one signifier to another. But here, on the other hand, lies the main difference between the two conceptualisations. The Freudian concept is ontic—in the sense that Freud sees in it a manifestation of a principle of biology¹⁶⁶—while the Lacanian concept is, as Lacan says, *ontological*:

The *Trieb* [or drive] can in no way be limited to a psychological notion. It is an absolutely fundamental ontological notion, which is a response to a crisis of consciousness that we are not necessarily obliged to identify, since we are living it.¹⁶⁷

Richard Chessick has described Lacan's understanding of the death drive as an attempt to remove it "from its biological roots and yet preserve the concept as metapsychology and not a cosmic phantasy."¹⁶⁸ However, he remained unconvinced by Lacan's conclusions, claiming that they stem from a "misreading" of Freud's theory of the Ego "in order to negate it and justify a return to the topographic theory."¹⁶⁹ In my view, this argument is indefensible because it is based on a false premise. Even though it seems to be true that Lacan had wanted to remove the drives from biology, he *did not* advocate a return to Freud's topographic theory.



¹⁶⁴ *Seminar XI*, p. 257.

¹⁶⁵ See above, p. 113.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. Freud's explanation of his epistemological position in connection to his hypotheses—in this case the hypothesis of libido theory: "I try in general to keep psychology clear from everything that is different in nature from it, even biological lines of thought. For that very reason I should like at this point expressly to admit that the hypothesis of ... instincts (that is to say, the libido theory) rests scarcely at all upon a psychological basis, but derives its principal support from biology. But I shall be consistent enough to drop this hypothesis if psycho-analytic work should itself produce some other, more serviceable hypothesis about the instincts. So far, this has not happened. ... Since we cannot wait for another science to present us with the final conclusions on the theory of the instincts, it is far more to the purpose that we should try to see what light may be thrown upon this basic problem of biology by a synthesis of the *psychological* phenomena." Freud, 'On Narcissism', pp. 71-72.

¹⁶⁷ Lacan, *Seminar VII*, p. 127.

¹⁶⁸ Richard D. Chessick, 'The Death Instinct Revisited' *Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis*, 20 (1992), 3-28, p. 13.

¹⁶⁹ 'The Death Instinct Revisited', p. 14.

Chapter 5: Lacanian metapsychology

Lacan insisted that he remained a Freudian until the end of his teaching. However, it would not be completely incorrect to say that Lacan remained a faithful Freudian in the same way that Einstein remained a faithful Newtonian; Freudian psychoanalysis is included in the Lacanian version of it, but the latter comprises much more than the former. For example, whereas Freud tried until the end of his teaching to defend psychoanalysis' position within the sciences, Lacan positions psychoanalysis at a vantage point that allows it to *discuss* science rather than *be* a science. Still, in Lacan's view this vantage point does not elevate psychoanalysis to the status of a fundamental ontology or a new epistemology. Psychoanalysis can speak about other discourses as it can speak about itself; but it never ceases to be one of the *possible* discourses. In this sense, the question of a post-Freudian—that is, Lacanian—metapsychology seems to involve a circularity. Strictly speaking, there can be no such thing. But it is useful, as it denotes an ontological thematisation of a set of ontic (i.e., clinical) observations.¹

As discussed in the previous chapter, the basic assumption of the whole Freudian enterprise is that the human psyche is seen as an intrinsically deterministic “mental apparatus” that can be studied scientifically: mental phenomena can, in principle, be explained, in the sense that there is a reason things happen in this or that way. We saw that for Heidegger, as well as for Wittgenstein, Freud had also made the error of overlooking the difference between understanding and establishing the continuity of causal connections. According to them, thinking of something as a reason for a given state of affairs, does not mean that it has *caused* this state of affairs. In light of these criticisms, Freud's theory would emerge as rather unstable, without solid foundations.

Lacan approached the whole issue from a different angle. Acknowledging that Freud's method is Cartesian, Lacan stressed the fact that the Freudian subject, i.e., the human being as understood by Freud, is, just like the Cartesian one, a subject that seeks certainty—but cannot find it. Certainty is not a straightforward issue for the Freudian subject, because there is always something—a dream, a slip of the tongue, a neurotic symptom, or something like this—that gives reasons for doubt.² For Freud, the source of this “something” was the unconscious. The unconscious would serve, as Lacan argued, as the foundation for Freud's much sought-after certainty. Just like Descartes, who could establish the certainty of his existence by virtue of the fact that he doubts—that is, he thinks—in his own doubt, Freud could, Lacan says, be “assured that a thought is there, which is unconscious, which means that it reveals itself as absent”.³ This, of course, is linked to Lacan's understanding of the unconscious as a gap, as a disruption in a chain of signifiers.

¹ An argument about the need for a metapsychology from a Lacanian perspective has been presented in Paul Verhaeghe, *On Being Normal and Other Disorders: A Manual for Clinical Psychodiagnostics*, trans. Sigi Jottkandt (New York: Other Press, 2004).

² See Lacan, *Seminar XI*, p. 35.

³ *Seminar XI*, p. 36.

Now, there is nothing that could allow us to *predict* the intricacies of the interconnections between signifiers. A chain of signifiers itself is unique for each individual and is constructed within his or her life—guided, so to speak, by the internal logic of this person’s language.

The law of the signifier

Language provides a frame within the limits of which signifiers are interconnected; still, the specificities of these interconnecting pathways cannot be determined beforehand. They are being laid *retroactively*, so to speak, as new signifiers are “added” and are connected to earlier signifiers—after the fact, or *après-coup*, as Lacan had it.⁴

This is an effect of what Lacan called the *Law of the Signifier*, namely the law that governs the ways in which signifiers are linked to each other in a chain. These horizontal dependencies of signifiers are complemented by vertical dependencies according to two fundamental structures, metaphor and metonymy.⁵ The fact that the linking is only established retroactively renders this law non-predictive. You cannot outline the course these pathways *will* take. You can only back-trace the pathways already laid down, via free association.⁶ In other words, although the network of signifiers is governed by a law, there is nothing deterministic in its structure. Psychoanalysis, at least in its Lacanian rendering, does not claim—and *cannot* claim—that the human being is reducible to an effect of the workings of a law such as the law of signifier. It is only positing that the infinite myriads of possible configurations that one’s own network of signifiers can obtain are back-traceable—provided one is willing enough (or patient enough, one could add here) to enter into analysis.

The implications of this crucial insight by Lacan is that criticisms concerning psychoanalysis’s alleged determinism are now fading in importance. The law of signifier is conceived of as a descriptive law. As such, it does not predict anything; rather, it just *describes* the sequence of a series of states of affairs in such a way that there is no gap between them. As an example, Lacan says,

think of what is pictured in the law of action and reaction. There is here, one might say, a single principle. One does not go without the other. The mass of a body that is crushed on the ground is not the cause of that which it receives in return for its vital force—its mass is integrated in this force that comes back to it in order to dissolve its coherence by a return effect. There is no gap here, except perhaps at the end.⁷

A law conceived in this way needs to be distinguished from a *cause*. In fact, as Bruce Fink points out, in Lacan’s view modern science always attempts to eliminate the content of the concept *cause*: “Causality in science is absorbed into what we might call structure—cause leading to effect within an

⁴ *Après-coup* is Lacan’s translation of Freud’s “Nachträglichkeit”, or retroaction. See ‘Position of the Unconscious’, p. 711/839. See also above, p. 95.

⁵ Cf. ‘Direction of Treatment’, p. 517/618. For a discussion of metaphor and metonymy see below, pp. 126ff.

⁶ See above, pp. 103–105.

⁷ Lacan, *Seminar XI*, p. 22.

ever more exhaustive set of laws.”⁸ For modern science, as understood by Lacan, a cause is always something that intervenes and *breaks* a sequence of states of affairs.

Whenever we speak of cause ... there is always something anti-conceptual, something indefinite ... a hole, and something that oscillates in the interval. In short, there is cause only in something that doesn't work.⁹

For Lacan, this was where Freud's discovery of the unconscious can be situated. The unconscious is a disruption in the law of the signifier. It presents itself as a gap, as a discontinuity:

Discontinuity, then, is the essential form in which the unconscious first appears to us as a phenomenon—discontinuity, in which something is manifested as a vacillation.¹⁰

The concept of cause is quite an elusive one, and Lacan resorts to Aristotle's theory of four causes, borrowing from him two concepts that Aristotle had used in his discussion of chance: *tuché* (sometimes spelled as *tyché*; in Greek: *τύχη*) and *automaton* (in Greek: *αυτόματον*).¹¹ According to the British classicist W. K. C. Guthrie, Aristotle's discussion focused on if and how chance events can be thought as the source of results that would otherwise be brought up by this or that cause. He discussed, in other words, chance as a type of (incidental) cause. The distinction between *tuché* and *automaton* is related to their respective scopes: “*Tyché* is confined to the world of adult human beings. *Automaton*, the wider term, is an incidental cause in the sphere of purposive events in general ... It may apply to the behaviour of the lower animals or inanimate objects.”¹² Aristotle's conclusion was, Guthrie writes, that “chance is an incidental outcome of purposive actions or events” that were “directed at some other end.”¹³

This specific aspect of Aristotle's discussion is of particular interest for Lacan. It allows him to elucidate the question of cause in psychoanalysis by

revising the relation that Aristotle establishes between the *automaton*—and we know, at the present stage of modern mathematics, that it is the network of signifiers—and what he designates as the *tuché*—which is for us the encounter with the real.¹⁴

There may be questions in connection to Lacan's use of the terms *tuché* and *automaton*. Malcolm Bowie, for example, comments that Lacan “may seem to have these terms the wrong way around,” since “‘the real’ sounds rather like ‘nature’ and [talking about] ‘signifiers’ suggests the presence of a human subject.”¹⁵ However, the apparent confusion dissipates when one remembers that the Lacanian real, although sounding like “nature”, has little to do with nature, being a mental or

⁸ Bruce Fink, ‘Science and Psychoanalysis’ in Richard Feldstein, Bruce Fink, and Maire Jaanus (eds.), *Reading Seminar XI, Lacan's Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 55-64, p. 64.

⁹ Lacan, *Seminar XI*, p. 22.

¹⁰ *Seminar XI*, p. 25.

¹¹ See *Seminar XI*, p. 21.

¹² Guthrie, *Aristotle*, p. 235.

¹³ *Aristotle*, pp. 238-239, 240.

¹⁴ Lacan, *Seminar XI*, p. 52. For a discussion see also Monica Errity, ‘Tyche and Automaton in Aristotle's Physics’ *The Letter: Irish Journal for Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 51 (2012), 69-73.

¹⁵ Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 102-103.

psychic register. The point that Lacan tries to make is that the contingencies of the network of signifiers can be thought of as corresponding to the Aristotelian concept of *automaton*, whereas the chance encounter with a disruption (i.e., the gap of the unconscious) can be thought of as corresponding to *tuché*. “Let me recall to mind here,” he says,

the *automatic* functioning of the laws by which the following are articulated in the signifying chain: the substitution of one term for another to produce a metaphorical effect; the combination of one term with another to produce a metonymical effect.¹⁶

The subject is under the sway of the contingencies of his or her own network of signifiers (*automaton*), while disruptions come as chance encounters (*tuché*) with the real: “The real is beyond the *automaton*, the return, the coming-back, the insistence of the signs, by which we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle. The real is that which always lies behind the *automaton*.”¹⁷ Fink points out that Lacan’s discussion of the *automaton* evokes the (Freudian) concept of repetition: “What is commonly referred as repetition is nothing but the ‘insistence of signs’.”¹⁸

It’s perhaps interesting to note here that in *Seminar XX* Lacan employs Aristotle’s four causes in order to present the signifier as a cause of *jouissance*:

The signifier is the cause of *jouissance*. Without the signifier, how could we even approach that part of the body [that gave rise to the *jouissance* in question]? Without the signifier, how could we centre that something that is the material cause of *jouissance*? However fuzzy or confused it may be, it is a part of the body that is signified in this contribution. Now I will go right to the final cause, final in every sense of the term because it is the terminus—the signifier is what brings *jouissance* to a halt. ... The efficient, which Aristotle proposes as the third form of the cause, is nothing in the end but the project through which *jouissance* is limited. ... And the embrace, the confused embrace wherein *jouissance* finds its cause, its last cause, which is formal—isn’t it something like grammar that commands it?¹⁹

In other words, the signifier is that which allows *jouissance* to be revealed to the speaking being. It’s only because one is under the sway of the signifier that *jouissance* can be an issue. This, of course, does not mean that the signifier is the *source* of *jouissance*. It’s only that Lacan tries to bring into view the circularity that the signifier involves. *Jouissance* is crystallised (or cadaverised) as signifier, and in the process it comes into view *because* of the signifier.

The subject of science

A recurrent theme in Lacan’s teaching throughout the years was the relation of psychoanalysis to science. This theme—which was also inherited from Freud—ran along two different axes: one about the relation of psychoanalysis, as a method and a theory, to scientific methodology and objectives; and another about the emergence of the psychoanalytic field as such.

Regarding the first, Lacan was unambiguous from the very beginning of his engagement with such ideas. In 1936 he stated:

¹⁶ Lacan, ‘Direction of Treatment’, p. 519/622 (emphasis added). For metaphor and metonymy see below, pp. 126–128.

¹⁷ *Seminar XI*, pp. 53–54.

¹⁸ Fink, ‘The Real Cause of Repetition’, p. 225.

¹⁹ Lacan, *Seminar XX*, pp. 24–25.

For while I consider it legitimate to privilege the historical method in studying facts of consciousness, I do not use it as a pretext to elude the intrinsic critique that questions their value. Such a critique ... will allow us to see why the late nineteenth century form of psychology that claimed to be scientific and forced itself even on its adversaries, thanks both to its apparatus of objectivity and its profession of materialism, simply failed to be positive, excluding from the outset both objectivity and materialism.²⁰

Lacan was much more interested in the second question. What was it that made possible the invention of psychoanalysis?

This is not a simple question. Psychoanalysis would not be possible at all if people were not able, ready, or willing to consider the objects it studies—the manifestations of mental life—as objects that *can* be studied at all. Let us take dreams, for example. People have always been fascinated by dreams; but the idea that dreams follow a certain internal logic—albeit unknown—and can be objects of scientific study was novel at the time of Freud. Freud was not the only scientist who took dreams seriously. But as the first chapter of *Interpretation of Dreams* testifies, Freud was one of the few who decided to proceed further along this route.²¹

In Lacan's understanding, in order for psychoanalysis to be at all possible as a scientific discipline, a prior step had to have been already taken.²² As we saw earlier, Lacan stressed the fact that the Freudian subject—i.e., the human being as understood by Freud—is a subject that seeks certainty, just like the Cartesian subject. It was only after Descartes that phenomena of the mind became objects of scrutiny.

Psychic phenomena, such as those that made Freud introduce the hypothesis of the unconscious, would not be perceived as phenomena that warrant further investigation were it not for Descartes's revolution. This, of course, does not mean that they were unobserved before Descartes; the point rather is that before Descartes such phenomena were taken as evidence of interventions or interactions of a divine rather than a human nature; they were thought of as omens or messages carrying secret meanings. As Russell Grigg comments,

Lacan may well have been echoing these remarks of Koyré's when he declared that 'Descartes inaugurates the initial bases of a science in which God has no part.' But in Lacan's view, what was decisive for the emergence of science was not *just* the constitution of a new object in the form of mathematized nature but *also* the emergence of the Cartesian cogito as the subject of science.²³

As Lacan explained, "it's no coincidence that psychoanalysis appeared well after the appearance of ... scientific discourse. Psychoanalysis does not cease to have a relation with the scientific discourse. They are of the same nature."²⁴ The unconscious speaks, said Lacan—it "tells the truth about truth"; and

²⁰ 'Beyond the "Reality Principle"', p. 59/74.

²¹ See Freud, 'The Interpretation of Dreams', pp. 57-168.

²² As Russell Grigg points out, Lacan's views on science were influenced by the work of Alexandre Koyré. See Russell Grigg, *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), pp. 141-142. For a discussion connecting Koyré with Lacan see Jean-Claude Milner, 'The Doctrine of Science' [1995], trans. Oliver Feltham, in Joan Copjec (ed.), *UMBR(a): A Journal for the Unconscious. Science and Truth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 33-63, p. 36. See also Grigg, *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy*, pp. 140-142. For A. Koyré and his discussion of ancient and modern science, see above, pp. 46-50.

²³ *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy*, p. 137.

²⁴ Lacan, 'At the Institut français in London (3 Feb. 1975)', p. 297.

Freud “knew how to let [this] truth ... speak” and bring up all the “rhetorical effects that we can recognise only by means of the subject of science.”²⁵

I am saying, contrary to what has been trumped up about a supposed break on Freud's part with the scientism of his time, that it was this very scientism ... that led Freud, as his writings show, to pave the way that shall forever bear his name.²⁶

It is in this sense that Lacan insisted that “the subject upon which we operate in psychoanalysis can only be the subject of science”; a position that, as he admits, “may seem paradoxical.”²⁷

A subject of science is neither a subject that adopts scientific methods—i.e., a scientist—nor the human being as a subject of scientific research. It is, rather, the subject that is surprised by the products of his or her own psyche, which he or she then considers as concerning himself or herself. The subject of science is the doubtful Cartesian subject who is perplexed—and sometimes disturbed—by their own desire.

Freud's originality, in Lacan's view, was that he first took these mental phenomena to be individual products of the mind of this or that individual human being, as manifestations of the suffering of specific individuals. These individuals, the *subjects* of psychoanalysis, were invited, by Freud, to reflect upon their own suffering, via a dialectical process of questions and answers. At the root of Freud's invitation was his belief that the subject held the keys to the meaning of his or her “unconscious formations”. And it is in this sense that Lacan equated the subject of psychoanalysis to the subject of science—namely, in the belief that the subject of psychoanalysis can be invited to take ownership of, and reflect critically upon, his or her own suffering. The tools for this reflection are language and speech.²⁸

To summarise, Lacan's own originality in approaching the question about how psychoanalysis stands vis-à-vis science was, therefore, twofold. On one hand he argued that the emergence of the subject of psychoanalysis is a phenomenon parallel and intimately connected to the phenomenon of the emergence of the subject of science, i.e., of the Cartesian subject; that is, he showed that psychoanalysis as a discipline was only possible now (after Descartes) because it entailed a Cartesian way of engaging with the world (and consequently with one's own suffering).

He showed, on the other hand, how the recognition of this (Cartesian) connection between the subject of psychoanalysis and the subject of science renders the whole issue of the scientificity of psychoanalysis irrelevant: it is psychoanalysis that allows us to outline the emergence of the subject of science, and not the other way around. In other words, psychoanalysis allows us to see science as a *discourse*, the term “discourse” (in Lacanian theory) denoting, as we shall see, the structure of a subject's emergence within a signifying chain.²⁹ Reversely, it's only psychoanalysis that allows us to see

²⁵ ‘Science and Truth’, p. 737/868.

²⁶ ‘Science and Truth’, p. 728/857.

²⁷ ‘Science and Truth’, p. 729/858.

²⁸ In this connection, Juan-David Nasio writes: “If the unconscious exists, it can only exist within the field of psychoanalysis, and more precisely, within the field of the cure”. Juan-David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan*, trans. David Pettigrew and François Raffoul (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 45.

²⁹ See below, pp. 141-145.

that psychoanalysis *itself* is a different kind of discourse, a practice of “chit-chat”, as Lacan says in 1977, in the inaugural lesson of his *Seminar XXV*:

What I have to say to you, I am going to say it, is that psychoanalysis is to be taken seriously, even though it is not a science. It is even not a science in any way. Because the problem is, as someone called Karl Popper has superabundantly shown, that it is not a science because it is irrefutable. It is a practice that will last as long as it will last, it is a practice of chit-chat. ... This does not prevent analysis from having consequences: it says something.³⁰

This brings us back to the question of language.

Language, metonymy, metaphor

Building on Freud’s realisation that language is related to suffering and has unexpected and surprising effects on the body, Lacan saw language not just as a system of communication adopted by human beings because of their need to co-operate and exchange information. He tried to formulate the whole process of becoming human as an effect of language. Becoming human, here, is meant in the sense of submitting to the symbolic order, and accepting the position of the divided subject:

In its symbolizing function, speech tends toward nothing less than a transformation of the subject to whom it is addressed by means of the link it establishes with the speaker—namely, by bringing about a signifying effect. This is why we must return once more to the structure of communication in language and definitively dispel the mistaken notion of ‘language as signs’, a source in this realm of confusions about discourse and of errors about speech.³¹

Language comprises an articulated network of signifierised jouissance, i.e., signifiers which carry signifieds. These signifiers do not exist in isolation. By stressing their interconnection and postulating the signifying chain, Lacan was able to describe the subject of language as that which is represented by one signifier to another signifier:

My definition of the signifier (there is no other) is as follows: a signifier is what represents the subject to another signifier. This latter signifier is therefore the signifier to which all the other signifiers represent the subject—which means that if this signifier is missing, all the other signifiers represent nothing. For something is only represented to.³²

The subject is always under the sway of the law of the signifier; whatever is his or her very own is manifested as a surprise, a gap in the signifying chain. It is there that the unconscious is to be found. The gap, of course, is an empty placeholder that can only be occupied by a signifier.

When speaking about the law of the signifier, one refers to the law that governs the ways in which signifiers are linked to each other in a chain. These *horizontal* associative dependencies of signifiers are complemented by *vertical* structures of dependency that govern the ways different signifying chains are connected one with another. Drawing on the work of the Russian-American linguist Roman Jakobson, Lacan recognised that these dependencies were akin to what in linguistics are called *metaphor* and *metonymy*.

³⁰ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXV: The Moment to Conclude* [1977-78], trans. Cormac Gallagher (Unauthorised translation from unpublished manuscript: www.lacaninireland.com), p. 1 (translation slightly altered).

³¹ ‘Function and Field’, p. 245/298.

³² ‘Subversion of the Subject’, pp. 693-694/819.

Jacobson had described two main types of aphasia as failures in the relations of similarity or contiguity between signifiers, and had pointed out the parallelism between these phenomena to the linguistic devices of metaphor and metonymy:

Every form of aphasic disturbance consists in some impairment ... either of the faculty for selection and substitution or for combination and contexture. ... Metaphor is alien to the similarity disorder, and metonymy to the contiguity disorder.³³

Familiar as he was with Freudian ideas, Jacobson saw that there are parallels between the devices of metaphor and metonymy, and the mechanisms of dream work.

In an inquiry into the structure of dreams the decisive question is whether the symbols and temporal sequences used are based on contiguity (Freud's metonymic 'displacement' and synecdochic 'condensation') or on similarity (Freud's 'identification and symbolism').³⁴

The function of the main tool of psychoanalysis, then—namely, free association—is to allow the subject to follow the different pathways as they are opened at every metaphoric or metonymic juncture. Lacan went one step further, suggesting that even symptoms are products of a metaphoric mechanism:

Metaphor's two-stage mechanism is the very mechanism by which symptoms, in the analytic sense, are determined. Between the enigmatic signifier of sexual trauma and the term it comes to replace in a current signifying chain, a spark flies that fixes in a symptom—a metaphor in which flesh or function is taken as a signifying element—the signification, that is inaccessible to the conscious subject, by which the symptom may be dissolved.³⁵

In fact, as Grigg points out, "The theory of metaphor and, to a lesser extent, of metonymy does a lot of work for Lacan. ... The subject is a metaphor the father of the Oedipus complex is a metaphor; the symptom is a metaphor; and love, too, is a metaphor."³⁶

In an attempt to formalise the metonymic and metaphoric mechanisms in their most elementary (and condensed) form, Lacan constructed, in 1957, two formulas, two "*mathèmes*",³⁷ whereby metonymy and metaphor are represented by functions (*f*) operating on signifiers (*S*) and significations or signifieds (*s*).³⁸

³³ Jakobson and Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, p. 90.

³⁴ *Fundamentals of Language*, p. 85.

³⁵ Lacan, 'Instance of the Letter', p. 431/518.

³⁶ Grigg, *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy*, p. 151.

³⁷ Lacanian "formulas", or mathemes (in French: mathèmes), represent his attempts to inscribe in a most condensed way the structural interdependencies between two or more elements. The term matheme itself, introduced in 1973, is thought to be constructed on the basis of the phoneme (of linguistics) and mytheme, or part of a myth (of ethnology). See "Mathème" in Glowinski, Marks, and Murphy (eds.), *A Compendium of Lacanian Terms*, pp. 110-113. Lacanian formulas usually employ a notation that resembles a lot—but only superficially—our familiar algebraic notation: It has letters, symbols and operators which resemble the ones of normal algebra (such as: *a*, *b*, *c*, *f*, *x*, *S*, *Φ*, *∀*, *∃*, *→*, *,*, *e.tc.*). However, Lacanian formulas do not belong to algebra at all, and normal conventions of algebra (such as simplification or factorisation) do not apply. For a discussion of Lacan's use of mathematics see below, pp. 153-158.

³⁸ The two formulas for metonymy and metaphor are respectively the following:

$$f(S \dots S')S \cong S(-)s$$

and

Crucially, metaphor allows us to understand how new significations are being produced. As Lacan explains,

we must define metaphor by the implantation in a signifying chain of another signifier, by which the one it supplants falls to the rank of the signified, and as a latent signifier perpetuates there the interval by which another signifying chain can be grafted onto it.³⁹

In other words, the structure of metaphor allows the subject to escape the restrictions of a signifying chain, by substituting a signifier (of a particular signifying chain) with another signifier (of a different signifying chain).⁴⁰ “It is in the substitution of signifier for signifier that a signification effect is produced that is poetic or creative, in other words, that brings the signification in question into existence.”⁴¹ As Lacan explains,

metaphor is, quite radically speaking, the effect of the substitution of one signifier for another in a chain, nothing natural predestining the signifier for this function of phoros apart from the fact that two signifiers are involved, which can, as such, be reduced to a phonemic opposition.⁴²

In other words, there is no restriction to the ways in which a signifier can be substituted for another other than the obvious requirement that the signifiers are distinguishable.⁴³

This analysis of metaphor leads us to the more important question of the emergence of signification.

Emergence of signification: the phallus

The observation that signifiers are inter-connectable in signifying chains, and that junctions between signifying chains are governed by mechanisms such as metaphor or metonymy, does not provide us with an answer to the question regarding the origins of signification. It only refers to the fact that

$$f\left(\frac{S'}{S}\right)S \cong S(+)s$$

For a discussion, see Lacan, ‘Instance of the Letter’, pp. 428-429/515-516. In 1961 Lacan rewrote the formula of metaphor as follows:

$$\frac{S}{S'_1} \cdot \frac{S'_2}{x} \rightarrow S\left(\frac{1}{s''}\right)$$

See ‘Metaphor of the Subject’, p. 756/890. There Lacan applies his formula to an analysis of a specific literary example. His elaboration is rather cryptic, and Grigg has argued it appears incorrect. See Grigg, *Lacan, Language, and Philosophy*, pp. 167-169. See also Jacques Lacan, ‘Preface’ in Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), viii-xv, pp. xii-xiii.

³⁹ ‘Ernest Jones’, p. 594/708.

⁴⁰ It is interesting to note the similarities of this view regarding the creative aspect of metaphor, with the views of contemporary American pragmatist philosophers like R. Rorty. As Rorty writes, “to think of metaphorical sentences as the forerunners of new uses of language, uses which may eclipse and erase old uses, is to think of metaphor as on a par with perception and inference, rather than thinking of it as having a merely ‘heuristic’ or ‘ornamental’ function.” Rorty, ‘Philosophy as Science’, p. 14.

⁴¹ Lacan, ‘Instance of the Letter’, p. 429/515.

⁴² ‘Metaphor of the Subject’, p. 756/890.

⁴³ M. Marini has followed Lacan’s various discussions of metaphor in texts of this period and comments that “the heterogeneous character of the arguments suggests Lacan may not have been all that sure of his theory of metaphor.” Marini, *Lacan*, p. 183.

entities that could carry meaning are linked one with another in chains and that these chains are also interconnected.

We saw, however, that one of the effects of the metaphoric structure is that it induces a signifying effect by making one signifier step in, so to speak, in the place of another signifier. What we would need here, then, is some insight relating to the inaugural moment during which the first metaphor is established.⁴⁴

Lacan approaches this in terms of what he calls the phallus. He defines the phallus as a signifier whose function is “to designate meaning effects as a whole, insofar as the signifier conditions them by its presence as signifier.”⁴⁵ Lacan builds on Freud’s observation of the little game his grandson invented to account for the periodic presence and absence of his mother, which could not but be a source of anxiety that he would have to master in some way.⁴⁶ In Freud’s (and Lacan’s) view, the matter is not just a question of a basic biological need (namely feeding) that has to be attended to. There is anxiety when the mother (or carer) is away, and there is joy (or pleasure) when the mother is there. All this anxiety and all this joy—in short, all this *jouissance*—overwhelms the infant and has to be processed in some way.

The presence of the mother is linked to the care and pleasure that the infant begins to expect from her, in the sense that it becomes its cue (or sign); similarly the absence of the mother becomes a sign of the anticipated anxiety (because of the absence). The child needs to master these extremes, and in this it is helped by a *third* pole, which is supposed to account for the mother’s absence: if the mother is away, this can only be because she *wants* something that she *lacks*.

The mother wants something, but what she wants is unknown to the child. The question, according to Lacan, “cannot be solved by reducing things to biological data; the very necessity of the myth underlying the structuring brought on by the Oedipus complex demonstrates this sufficiently.”⁴⁷ There is a clear difference between what one could call a biological need and a need that can be thought of as a demand or desire:

Needs become subordinate to the same conventional conditions as does the signifier in its double register: the synchronic register of opposition between irreducible elements, and the diachronic register of substitution and combination, through which language, while it does not fulfil all functions, structures everything in interpersonal relations.⁴⁸

That’s where the phallus finds its place.

The phallus as a signifier provides the ratio [in French: *raison*] of desire (in the sense in which the term is used in ‘mean and extreme ratio’ of harmonic division). I shall thus be using the phallus as an algorithm ... The fact that the phallus is a signifier requires that it be in the place of the Other that the subject have access to it. But since this signifier is there only as veiled and as ratio [*raison*] of the Other’s desire, it is the Other’s desire as such that the

⁴⁴ By postulating an “inaugural moment” I make an implicit reference to a starting point in what is a signifying chain or a temporal sequence.

⁴⁵ Lacan, ‘Signification of the Phallus’, p. 579/690.

⁴⁶ See Freud’s account of his grandson’s game “o-o-o-o” and “da” (“fort”, and “da”) in Freud, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, p. 284.

⁴⁷ Lacan, ‘Signification of the Phallus’, pp. 576-577/686.

⁴⁸ ‘Direction of Treatment’, pp. 519/618-619.

subject is required to recognize—in other words, the other insofar as he himself is a subject divided by the signifying *Spaltung*.⁴⁹

The phallus, then, is thought as the imaginary object of what the mother wants (i.e., lacks); as such it becomes the signifier of this lack, and inaugurates the whole network of signifiers that constitutes subjectivity and reveals (or represents) the divided subject. In short: the phallus is the signifier of a lack; a network of signifiers is created as a metaphor of lack; and the divided subject is represented by its network of signifiers. If, following Lacan, we use the symbol $\$$ to designate the divided subject, and $S_1 \rightarrow S_2$ to designate the interconnection between signifiers, then the relation between the two can be written as follows:

$$\frac{S_1 \rightarrow S_2}{\$}$$

The connecting structure, as a scaffolding so to speak, represents the subject in his or her individuality. This formula is equivalent to Lacan's referring to the subject of language—i.e., the divided subject, written here as $\$$ —as represented by a signifier to another signifier and will be helpful for the discussion of Lacan's discourse theory below.⁵⁰

Meaning comes as a secondary effect of the fact that there are signifiers and that these signifiers are interconnected. Lacan calls this *signifierness* (in French: *signifiance*). As Bruce Fink explains,

When Lacan uses the term [signifierness], it is to emphasize the nonsensical nature of the signifier, the very existence of signifiers apart from any possible meaning or signification they might have; it is to emphasize the fact that the signifier's very existence exceeds its signifiatory role, that its substance exceeds its symbolic function, to signify.⁵¹

For Lacan, signifierness is not installed via the establishment of a correspondence between a signifier and a signified: at the beginning, there were no signifieds as such. Any given signified was *originally* a signifier belonging in another chain of signifiers.⁵²

In *Seminar XX* Lacan had commented that the function of the phallus is “not unrelated” to the bar between the signifier and the signified,

$$\frac{S}{s}$$

—were it not for which “nothing about language could be explained by linguistics. Were it not for this bar above which there are signifiers that pass, you could not see that signifiers are injected into the signified.”⁵³ Lacan's suggestion can perhaps be understood in the sense that the bar represents that which allows us to see that there are signifiers beyond (or, perhaps, *over*) the signified—in other words, the bar is representing the effect of signifierness, and as such it allows us to see language in its material aspect, namely beyond (or before) signifierness. That, as Lacan says, is “not unrelated” to the function of the phallus—it is because of a process akin to that of metaphor that the second signifier obtained

⁴⁹ ‘Signification of the Phallus’, pp. 581-582/693. *Spaltung* is the term Freud used to indicate the *splitting* or division of the Ego because of internal conflicts. See Freud, ‘Splitting of the Ego in the Process of Defence’.

⁵⁰ See below, pp. 141ff.

⁵¹ Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p. 19n12.

⁵² The term “originally” needs to be understood here in a structural rather than a temporal sense.

⁵³ Lacan, *Seminar XX*, pp. 40, 34.

the structural position of what we call signified. This process is what Lacan calls function of the phallus, and it is in this sense that the phallus can also be understood as the metaphor of desire (as lack).

In connection to this, Fink wonders: “How we could understand the bar or barrier between the signifier and the signified as being in any way related to the biological organ associated with the male of the species is truly difficult to see.”⁵⁴ Fink’s comment is rather surprising in that the term *phallus*, as used by Lacan, is something very different from the biological organ. The barrier between signifier and signified is *not* thought of as related to a biological organ, but to a function. In my view, what Lacan tries to show is twofold: first, that signification emerges because of the phallus (i.e., because of the mother wanting something *other* than just the baby); and, second, that the *event* of this emergence remains hidden—pushed, so to speak, beyond signification, or lost.

The corporeality of language: *lalangue*

Lacan comments that linguistics has mistakenly spoken about the arbitrariness of the connection (or joiner) between signifier and signified—mistakenly, because it misses the point.⁵⁵ It’s not the case that the interconnection is arbitrary but also stable; on the contrary, it only *appears* as arbitrary because it’s lost; and it’s lost because it’s not stable. Arbitrariness, in other words, comes as the result of the non-stability of the connection.

Meaning effects seem to bear no relation to what causes them. That means that the references or things the signifier serves to approach remain approximate—macroscopic, for example. ... At the level of the signifier/signified distinction, what characterizes the relationship between the signified and what serves as the indispensable third party, namely the referent, is precisely that the signified misses the referent. The joiner doesn’t work.⁵⁶

In the previous chapter we saw how Lacan described the loose attachment of the network of signifiers to the network of signifieds as the quilting point. As we see now, signifieds and signifiers are entities of the same kind, the only differentiation between the two being their structural position. It is because of the function of the phallus that a signifier’s connection to another signifier becomes stabilised, allowing the second signifier to emerge as if it was the *meaning* of the first. The two signifiers are then connected with a quilting point.⁵⁷ Elaborating on the quilting point, Lacan suggested that the concept can be thought of as a translation of the ancient Stoic “expressible” or “say-able” (in Greek: *λεκτόν*).⁵⁸ The Stoics had advocated a materialist theory of the mind, and their conception of the say-able was intended to explain how something immaterial (incorporeal) like meaning can come out of something material that can bear a meaning (a signifier).⁵⁹ Lacan emphasised that the Stoics used the

⁵⁴ Bruce Fink, ‘Knowledge and Jouissance’ in Suzanne Barnard and Bruce Fink (eds.), *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan’s Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Female Sexuality* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 21-45, p. 37.

⁵⁵ See Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p. 19.

⁵⁶ *Seminar XX*, p. 20.

⁵⁷ This can be also read in connection to C.S. Pierce’s conceptualisation of the sign as a ring in a chain, so to speak, of signs formed by the exchange of signs between their users. See above p. 100.

⁵⁸ See Lacan, ‘Préface à l’Édition des Écrits en Livre de Poche’, p. 390.

⁵⁹ See Dirk Baltzly, ‘Stoicism’ *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/stoicism/>, accessed 22 May 2016.

term “signifier” to refer to what, for them, is “most primordial” in language, and likened his own object *a* as “the major incorporeal of the Stoics”.⁶⁰ For the Stoics, a signifier, which is always a material, or corporeal, entity, is thought of as bonded with the incorporeal world of meaning. This bond was conceived by the Stoics as a product of an act of saying, hence its designation as “say-able”. The similarity to Lacan’s conceptualisation of the *quilting point* is evident.

One could say that Lacan’s own theory of language is materialistic, or corporeal, in much the same way as the theory of the Stoics. “Speech is a gift of language,” he says as early as in 1953, “and language is not immaterial. It’s a subtle body, but a body it is.”⁶¹ Some people have wondered whether these similarities do in fact reflect Lacan’s deeper adherence to the philosophical system of Stoicism;⁶² in my view, however, this question is beside the point. It appears that Lacan draws all these parallels in an attempt to emphasise his divergence from any linguistic (and philosophical, for that matter) doctrine that lays more stress on meaning than it does on the elements that can carry meaning.

One could take as an example Lacan’s insistence on the primacy of the signifier. In order to discuss language and speaking without reference to meaning he introduced the neologism *lalangue*—a play on the words *la langue* (French for language/speech) written as one word.⁶³ *Lalangue* is speaking with no regard for what is being spoken about—for example, words taken as their sound, as phonemes, or when babbling or speaking in tongues. His intention was to stress the bodily, *corporeal* aspect of being engaged in the activity of speaking and, in so doing, to recast as a recursive construction the distinction that linguists usually designate as *duality of patterning*.⁶⁴

In Lacan’s view, Freud’s discovery consisted exactly in acknowledging that where psychical phenomena are concerned, language and words become materials, building blocks, and that their morphological features are as important as, if not more important than, their signifying features. As far as the analysis of psychical phenomena is concerned, meaningless fragments of words are just as important as meaningful ones (words and phrases), if not more.⁶⁵ Signifiers can be thought of as autonomous entities only within the particular signifying chains to which they belong. They comprise parts, each and every one of which can be found to belong in different, completely independent

⁶⁰ See Jacques Lacan, ‘The Place, Origin and End of My Teaching’ [1967], trans. David Macey, in Jacques-Alain Miller (ed.), *My Teaching* (London: Verso, 2008), 3–55, p. 36; and also ‘Preface’, p. xiv.

⁶¹ ‘Function and Field’, p. 248/301.

⁶² For an interesting discussion see Kurt Lampe, ‘Lekta: Stoic “Sayables” and Lacan’ *Stoicism & Continental Philosophy* (posted on 7 Nov. 2014), [Blog], <stoicisms.wordpress.com/tag/lekta/>, accessed 10 Apr. 2016.

⁶³ The term “lalangue” was first employed by Lacan in his Seminar of November 4, 1971 at Sainte Anne Hospital. See Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XIX*: The Knowledge of the Psychoanalyst* [1971–72], trans. Cormac Gallagher (Unauthorised translation from unpublished manuscript: www.lacanireland.com), pp. 14–5.

⁶⁴ This term refers, as Andrew Carstairs-McCarthy explains, to the fact that “linguistic expressions are analysable in two levels, as composed of meaningless elements (sounds, belonging to a finite inventory) and of meaningful ones (words and phrases).” Andrew Carstairs-McCarthy, *The Origins of Complex Language: An Inquiry into the Evolutionary Beginnings of Sentences, Syllables, and Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 8. Independently, the French linguist André Martinet has suggested the term *double articulation*, to describe the same phenomenon. See André Martinet, *Elements of General Linguistics*, trans. Elisabeth Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), pp. 22–24. This term was used by G. Deleuze and F. Guattari to describe in very generalised way phenomena of different types of organisation between what they called layers or *strata*. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Athlone Press, 1987), pp. 40–44.

⁶⁵ As an illustration one can take the Signorelli incident. See above, p. 105n96.

signifying chains. All signifying chains and their horizontal or vertical associative dependencies are what philosopher and biologist Humberto Maturana has in mind when he describes a linguistic domain as “a domain of consensual coordinations of actions or distinctions ... [arising as] a particular manner of living-together contingent upon the unique history of recurrent interactions of the participants during their co-ontogeny.”⁶⁶

Knowledge and truth

When signifierness and (eventually) meaning are installed, the signifying network becomes *knowledge*: at its core, knowledge as such is not dependent on the knower or on what is being known. For Lacan, knowledge is that which emerges when signifiers become interconnected in a network:

Knowledge initially arises at the moment at which S_1 comes to represent something, through its intervention in the field defined ... as an already structured field of knowledge. And the subject is its supposition, its *hypokeimenon*, insofar as the subject represents the specific trait of being distinguished from the living individual. The latter is certainly its locus, where the subject leaves its mark, but it isn't of the same order as what is brought in by the subject, by virtue of the status of knowledge.⁶⁷

In other words, the living individual—the human being—is the locus of the subject, but they are not of the same order: the (structural) position of the *subject* has nothing to do the (structural) position of the living individual.

Such a definition of knowledge brings to the fore the question of truth, and its relation to knowledge. In 1970 Lacan begins his *Television* interview like this: “I always speak the truth. Not the whole truth, because there's no way to say it all. Saying it all is literally impossible: words fail. Yet it's through this very impossibility that the truth holds onto the real.”⁶⁸ For Lacan truth is something that is said in words (i.e., in a language); truth cannot be whole (because words fail); and truth is connected to the real—i.e., the source of the symbolic (and of words, for that matter). While it is not presented as a full, formal definition of truth, this small passage shows rather clearly that for Lacan truth is not conceived as a correspondence between a proposition and a state of affairs.

Lacan's conception of truth, then, is closely related to his assertion that there is no *metalanguage*. As discussed earlier, metalanguage is a term of logic and linguistics that describes a language that contains statements about another language. In Tarski's theory of truth, a metalanguage contains statements about an object-language, in which states of affairs are described or postulated.⁶⁹ Not so for Lacan. He claims that in human language there is no vantage point from which one can

⁶⁶ Humberto R. Maturana, ‘The Biological Foundations of Self Consciousness and the Physical Domain of Existence’, *Beobachter: Konvergenz der Erkenntnistheorien?* (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1992), 47-117, p. 92. It could be added here that Maturana's work has been focused on questions regarding cognition. He has argued that “cognition as a biological function is such that the answer to the question, ‘What is cognition?’ must arise from understanding knowledge and the knower through the latter's capacity to know.” Maturana and Varela, *Autopoiesis*, p. 5.

⁶⁷ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* [1969-70], ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), p. 13.

⁶⁸ ‘Television’ [1970], trans. Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, in Joan Copjec (ed.), *Television* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 1-46, p. 3.

⁶⁹ See above, p. 23.

assert the truth value of a statement or a proposition. You can never escape the level of the language in which you speak: “No authoritative statement has any other guarantee ... than its very enunciation ... I formulate this by saying that there is no metalanguage that can be spoken, or, more aphoristically, that there is no Other of the Other.”⁷⁰

This assertion has implications for truth:

Everything that can be said of truth, of the only truth—namely, that there is no such thing as a metalanguage, ... no language being able to say the truth about truth, since truth is grounded in the fact that truth speaks, and that it has no other means by which to become grounded.⁷¹

As is the connection of metalanguage and truth with *being*: “I am going to say once again ... ‘There’s no such thing as a metalanguage.’ When I say that, it apparently means—no language of *being*”.⁷²

The question, of course, remains, regarding the origin of truth. If there is not such a thing as a metalanguage, and if no statement has any other guarantee than its enunciation, then truth as such is rendered unstable, impossible, or irrelevant.

Lacan, however, draws on Freud’s observation that the function of negation (a judgement as to whether a state of affairs holds true or not) is subsequent to a more primordial *affirmation* (in German: *Bejahung*) on the part of the subject.⁷³ Lacan sees Freud as arguing that “in a general way ... the condition such that something exists for a subject is that there be *Bejahung*, this *Bejahung* which isn’t a negation of the negation.”⁷⁴ In other words, Lacan reads Freud as claiming that truth as such is not founded on a judgement but on a primordial *affirmation* or *acceptance*.

For Lacan, truth is related to speaking as such. As soon as I speak, I speak the truth (or, perhaps, truth is spoken through me). Truth, then, means that I accept that I am the subject of language. For Lacan, nothing is revealed to the human being, at least not in the Heideggerian sense; rather, something is *missing* from the human being, and in the place of this lack the divided subject emerges as a speaking being. Speaking represents an affirmation, i.e., truth.

Lacan’s conceptualisation of truth as affirmation appears to be closely related to efforts in modern logic to escape the limitations of the distinction between an object language and a metalanguage, as in Jaakko Hintikka’s work, for example—with which Lacan was theoretically acquainted.⁷⁵ Hintikka has developed a first order logic in which—contrary to Tarski’s conception—truth is defined and expressed with no need to refer to a metalanguage. As Hintikka explains,

to speak of truth is not to speak of any independently existing correspondence between language and the world. There are no such relations. Or, as Wittgenstein once put it, the correspondence between language and the world is

⁷⁰ Lacan, ‘Subversion of the Subject’, p. 688/813.

⁷¹ ‘Science and Truth’, pp. 736-737/867-868.

⁷² *Seminar XX*, p. 118.

⁷³ See Freud, ‘Negation’, p. 441.

⁷⁴ Lacan, *Seminar I*, p. 58.

⁷⁵ See for example Lesson 8 (19 Feb. 1974) of *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXI: Les Non-Dupes Errent* [1973-74], trans. Cormac Gallagher (Unauthorised translation from unpublished manuscript: www.lacaninireland.com).

established only by the use of our language. ... Truth is literally constituted by certain human rule-governed activities.⁷⁶

Hintikka manages this by help of what he calls “semantical games” (called thus in reference to Wittgenstein’s language games),⁷⁷ in which winning strategies can be shown to exist, and by establishing an analogy “between the notion of truth and the existence of a winning strategy.”⁷⁸ For Hintikka, “this kind of truth definition is not restricted to formal ... first-order languages but ... can also be extended to natural languages.”⁷⁹ As he writes, “the idea of language games can be made a cornerstone of an extremely interesting logico-semantical theory. ... The involvement of humanly playable language games does not make a concept of truth any less objective or realistic.”⁸⁰

But in this way, truth becomes connected with time.

Logical time and temporality

The first aspect of a Lacanian understanding of time is implicitly connected with signification. Time is implied by the very nature of the signifier: in order to have a signifier we need to be able to distinguish entities, i.e., to differentiate something from its background; in addition to this, we need to be able to differentiate between presence and absence, in the sense that a signifier can only become a pointer to something if the presence of this something can somehow be discerned and registered. These two aspects of mental functioning are central and unavoidable parts of signification as a process. So, for example, the very first signifiers for the human infant would be related to the mother (voice, breast) and to the body (gaze, faeces). It is clear, here, that an inability to register and discern these differences would make the human being incapable of becoming a subject of language. This does not mean that this particular human being would lose the ability to live. Life, at the level of the biological mechanisms involved, would continue without major issues. But the world inhabited by this human being would be an impoverished one, not shared with other humans.⁸¹

These considerations do not provide us with a fuller understanding of how time is involved at the very basic level, that of perception (such as Freud was hoping to reach). One needs to differentiate between clocking the passage of time as a function of the human body as such, and of awareness of the passage of time on the level of our dealings with the world. Regardless of the depth of our understanding of this function, and of the tools and concepts we use to study it, we can accept that in order to sustain life the biological organism needs to have at least two abilities. The one is receptiveness to the periodicity of bodily functions and the other is receptiveness to the difference between presence and absence. These abilities represent the absolute minimum for the biological

⁷⁶ Jaakko Hintikka, *The Principles of Mathematics Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 44.

⁷⁷ Cf. Merrill B. Hintikka and Jaakko Hintikka, *Investigating Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 13, 15.

⁷⁸ Hintikka, *Principles*, p. 27.

⁷⁹ *Principles*, p. 28.

⁸⁰ *Principles*, p. 23.

⁸¹ The reference here is to Heidegger’s conception of man as world-forming, in contrast to the stone which is worldless and the animal which is poor in world. Cf., above, pp. 26–28.

organism, and they are not adequate to account for our concerned dealings with a world that has been already disclosed to us. We have a circle here: time needs to exist at some lower (ontic) level in order to have a living organism with or without the ability to enter the world of language, which would then unveil to the human being both ontic and ontological time. We can only postulate this “lower”, ontic time when we have already entered the world unveiled to us by language.

This sharing of the world with other humans is at the heart of Lacan’s argument about the emergence of logical or objective time. Writing in 1945, he used the parable of a puzzle to show how, by means of a progression of logical steps, a progression of temporal moments is also implicitly created. In this “sophism” as he called it. Three prisoners are invited to solve a logical puzzle. Timing is crucial, because the first to solve the puzzle will be the first (and only one) to gain his freedom. The puzzle is designed in such a way that one cannot arrive at the solution in one step. Each of the prisoners needs to decide their own actions in connection to the others’ actions. In this way, Lacan is able to distinguish between three different aspects of time modulation: a) the “Instant of the Glance”; b) the “Time for Comprehending”; and c) the “Moment of Concluding”. This modulation allows him to describe how the subjective sense of time (the hesitation of each prisoner in the story) is de-subjectified by the collective action of all three prisoners, resulting in the emergence of what Lacan calls “objective” time.⁸²

So in this early paper Lacan argued that objective time is a product of coordinated symbolic human interaction—that is, a product of language: As he himself commented some years later, he had

attempted to demonstrate in the logic of a sophism the temporal mainsprings through which human action, insofar as it is coordinated with the other's action, finds in the scansion of its hesitations the advent of its certainty; and, in the decision that concludes it, gives the other's action—which it now includes—its direction [in French: *sens*] to come, along with its sanction regarding the past. ... It is the certainty anticipated by the subject in the ‘time for understanding’ which—through the haste that precipitates the ‘moment of concluding’—determines the other's decision that makes the subject's own movement an error or truth. This example indicates how the mathematical formalization that inspired Boolean logic, and even set theory, can bring to the science of human action the structure of intersubjective time that psychoanalytic conjecture needs to ensure its own rigor.⁸³

By claiming that objective—i.e., intersubjective—time is a shared product of the coordination of human interaction, Lacan comes very close to what Heidegger calls the *publicness* of time, which is one of the specific characteristics of world-time, i.e., “the time which makes itself public in the temporalizing of temporality ... because it *belongs to the world*”.⁸⁴ And also he comes very close to Hintikka’s conceptualisation of truth in terms of a language game.

The similarity I observe emerges on two levels: on one level, both Lacan’s and Hintikka’s conceptualisations involve some sort of rule-governed human activity—a puzzle or a semantic game, respectively. Apart from this—and in fact *because* of this—both Lacan’s and Hintikka’s conceptualisations involve time.⁸⁵ They are both *discursive*. In Lacan’s case, what is at stake is mainly

⁸² See Lacan, ‘Logical Time’, pp. 167-173/204-211.

⁸³ ‘Function and Field’, pp. 237-238/287.

⁸⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 467/414. See also above, pp. 53f.

⁸⁵ M. Marini points out that game theory and cybernetics were part of the Lacanian theoretical landscape from the date of publication of this paper, 1945, up to his first seminar in 1954. See Marini, *Lacan*, pp. 145-146.

time. In Hintikka's case, time is *introduced* to something traditionally thought to be time-independent, namely first-order formal logic.

Lacan returns to the subject of time and temporality repeatedly. In *Seminar VI*, for example, he says:

At a time when the whole of philosophy is engaged in articulating what it is that links time to being, that it is quite simple to see that time, in its very constitution, past-present-future (those of grammar) refers itself to the act of the word—and to nothing else. The present, is the moment at which I speak and nothing else.

It is strictly impossible for us to conceive of a temporality in an animal dimension. Namely in a dimension of appetite. The abc of temporality requires even the structure of language.⁸⁶

For Lacan, the structure of the psyche is a set of timeless pathways interconnecting signifiers—timeless, i.e., outside of time constraints. The present is related to speaking. Speaking discloses time to the speaking being by the very fact that the elements of a speech act (phonemes, words, sentences) cannot be delivered simultaneously.⁸⁷ Time—or rather, temporality—remains, for Lacan, a linguistic construction, that is, a product of language, overlaid on the “now”, i.e., on the moment at which we speak. It follows from this that the relation to temporality of animals or pre-verbal humans—i.e., infants—is fundamentally different. All living beings *are* in time, as living, biological organisms, but only those who can share a world as revealed in the shared intersubjective coordination of human interaction can also partake in temporality.

In *Seminar XI*, Lacan discusses time in connection to desire:

Now, although desire merely conveys what it maintains of an image of the past towards an ever short and limited future, Freud declares that [desire] is nevertheless *indestructible*. Notice that in the term indestructible, it is precisely the most inconsistent reality of all that is affirmed. If indestructible desire escapes from time, to what register does it belong in the order of things? For what is a thing, if not that which endures, in an identical state, for a certain time? Is not this the place to distinguish in addition to duration, the substance of things, another mode of time—a logical time?⁸⁸

In other words, Lacan suggests here that temporality is installed by the signifier (“logical time”), *in addition* to duration (“the substance of things”) and explains that the motive force behind all this (“desire”) is in itself outside the signifier (i.e., “indestructible”). This formulation reveals a differentiation between time qua duration and time qua temporality. Duration, as such, is a compound notion, including the temporal aspect of presence, and the temporal aspect of speaking. Both speaking (as sound) and presence (of objects) reveal themselves to the human being in the real.⁸⁹ I understand this as reflecting a differentiation between duration—as time in the real—and temporality, as a scaffolding of time relations in the imaginary and the symbolic.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Lacan, *Seminar VI*, p. 203.

⁸⁷ I have elaborated this argument elsewhere. See Tombras, ‘Kicking Down the Ladder’, pp. 127-129.

⁸⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XI*, pp. 31-32.

⁸⁹ That is, they do not need the signifier; it is rather the signifier that comes from them—just as the imaginary and the symbolic come from the real.

⁹⁰ One could see a parallel here with Heidegger's conception of time as the horizon of being vis-à-vis his discussion about the four characteristics of world-time—namely significance, datability, extendedness, and publicness.

Adrian Johnston has commented that with his prisoner's dilemma sophism Lacan attempts to overcome classical logic's operation outside time—an operation which is thought to be unfolding “in a strictly synchronic fashion.” As such, the sophism can be read, in Johnston's view, as “a challenge to the confinement of logic within spatiotemporal organizations.”⁹¹ Johnston claims that the challenge fails because it only works in connection to the temporal dimension and not the spatial. More generally, Johnston believes that Lacan fails to reconcile the timelessness of the unconscious (as postulated by Freud) with his own attempt to derive temporality from the symbolic (logical time), and claims that the problem persists until the end of Lacan's teaching, i.e., even until after Lacan decided to turn to mathematics and topology.⁹² As he writes: “The unavoidable question still remains regarding how Freud's timeless unconscious and Lacan's ‘temporal logic’ of the unconscious can or should be reconciled with each other.”⁹³ Johnston's arguments are, however, weakened if, as suggested above, one considers Lacan's conceptualisation of duration as time in the real; and of temporality as a scaffolding of imaginary and symbolic time relations. In my view, timelessness, in Freud's sense, is not irreconcilable with Lacan's “temporal logic”. Quite the contrary: the installation of the temporal logic (i.e., the installation of the signifying chain) gives rise to the emergence of signification, and from there to the function of the unconscious. It is exactly because Lacan is able to discern a temporal logic in his conceptualisation of the unconscious that he can describe the formations of the unconscious as gaps in a signifying chain.

Establishing historicity

We have seen how becoming human means submitting to the symbolic order and accepting the position of the divided subject.⁹⁴ The symbolic order is a static, motionless structure. It is a web of pathways that interconnects meaning-enabled elements. The symbolic, just like the Freudian unconscious, is timeless. It is irrelevant whether certain signifiers are “older” than others; in fact the very notion of the “age” of a signifier is an oxymoron as far as the subject is concerned. The only pointers to temporal relations between signifiers are provided by their place within the whole web, by the pathways that interconnect them, and by the obstacles along those pathways. These pathways are constantly “renegotiated”, so to speak, and may bring alterations to the temporal relations pointed to by them—a process of retroaction that Freud first recognised.⁹⁵

This temporal essence of speaking, its temporality, is never lost. It is there when a speech act takes place, and it is there when it is recalled, i.e., when it is brought back from memory. Moreover, it is still there when a speech act is constructed or rehearsed, i.e., during the process of thinking. It doesn't really matter if we think in order to say something, or if we just think because we think. All thinking is discursive and time is always disclosed in thinking, as it is disclosed in speaking or listening.

⁹¹ Adrian Johnston, *Time Driven: Metapsychology and the Splitting of the Drive* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2005), p. 32.

⁹² See *Time Driven*, pp. 55-57.

⁹³ *Time Driven*, p. 57.

⁹⁴ In what follows, and unless otherwise noted, I am using arguments and material that I have used elsewhere. See Tombras, ‘Kicking Down the Ladder’, pp. 129-132.

⁹⁵ See above, pp. 95-97

When I speak about thinking, here, I mean conscious thinking, i.e., thinking of which the thinking subject is fully aware. However, this is not the only kind of thinking, as Freud discovered. “Thinking” happens in the unconscious, too. But that thinking is recombinatory, rather than discursive, and takes place with no reference to time.⁹⁶ A dream is “presented before consciousness as an object of perception”,⁹⁷ i.e., it is not recounted. For the dreaming subject, the process of secondary revision brings a narrative logic to dream material.

Similarly, a kind of secondary revision brings “historicity”. I am using the term to denote the observation that human beings have an awareness of coming *from* somewhere, and going *to* somewhere, i.e., that they have a history and tend to let this history inform their future. History would not exist without time, or, rather, without *awareness* of time and temporality.

The question, then, is how it’s possible to make this step from temporality to historicity. This is not a self-evident step. To have a history, you need something more than just time. You need something that would give a perspective within the symbolic—a signifier that would set the symbolic in motion, so to speak. This signifier would create arrows that would point towards what is not here yet. In a way, it would provide a direction and a sense. That signifier, for Lacan, is *death*, which he, following Heidegger, conceives of ontologically, and connects with Freud’s death drive:

The death instinct essentially expresses the limit of the subject's historical function. This limit is death—not as the possible end date of the individual's life, nor as the subject's empirical certainty, but, as Heidegger puts it, as that ‘possibility which is the subject's ownmost, which is unconditional, unsurpassable, certain, and as such indeterminable’—the subject being understood as defined by his historicity.⁹⁸

Because there is death, and death is always not here yet, the subject can differentiate in the most radical way between what is not here *yet* (the future) from what *was* here (the past). We could say that the introduction of the signifier death reveals time as something like a vector that starts from the past and points to the future: it provides this vector with a sense.⁹⁹

Psychic structures

Lacan’s description of the Freudian unconscious in terms of gaps and interruptions in a signifying chain allowed him to consider psychopathology from a structural point of view, rather than one focusing on symptomatology. Symptoms are no longer seen as the most distinctive aspect of one’s “illness”, but rather as products of the specificities of one’s network of signifying chains; this is a *structured* network, reflecting a specific instance of psychic structure. The question of diagnosis, then, emerges as a question of differentiation between structural traits, rather than a question of clinically observable characteristics judged against an accepted notion of normality.

⁹⁶ Cf. Freud, ‘New Introductory Lectures’, pp. 48-49.

⁹⁷ ‘New Introductory Lectures’, p. 50.

⁹⁸ Lacan, ‘Function and Field’, pp. 261-262/318. Regarding Lacan’s effort to link Freud’s theory of the drives to Heidegger see the discussion in Muller and Richardson, *Lacan and Language*, pp. 91-94.

⁹⁹ The term *sense* is used here in its mathematical meaning, to indicate that time goes from past to the future.

As Paul Verhaeghe writes, medical science understands psychic normality “in terms of average scores, standard deviation, and modal personalities. This implies that psychic characteristics can be mathematically calculated and then presented in the famous bell-curve of normal distribution.”¹⁰⁰ In psychoanalysis, as Joël Dor explains, “the problem of diagnosis seems to depend on a new issue: What is the constancy—if it exists—of these structural traits that in turn presuppose a certain stability in the organisation of psychic structure?”¹⁰¹

We saw above that the first signifier (the phallus) is understood as related to the mother in terms of her comings and goings and the anxiety they produce; a third pole—third in the sense that it is different from the two poles of the subject and the mother—comes in to play as the (possible) reason for the mother’s absence. This third pole has the function of a limiting point for the omnipotence of the mother, presenting her as lacking something that she desires (signified by the phallus qua signifier). In other words, this third pole allows the subject to negotiate his or her relation to the phallus. Describing the dynamics of these early phenomena, Freud used the term “Oedipus complex” to designate a child’s preference and attachment to the parent of the opposite sex. According to the orthodox Freudian theory, the boy wants the mother but is met with a prohibition by the father, who makes it clear that the mother is off-limits.¹⁰² The penalty, should the boy refuse to accept this prohibition, would be castration. The boy, then, is being obliged to give up his mother as an object of sexual attention for fear of castration. In the case of the girl, the simple fact of the anatomical distinction between the sexes leads her along a different pathway. There is no threat of castration; rather, there is a belief that castration has already taken place. The girl turns against the mother and continues to love her father, albeit secretly.

Lacan looks at the Oedipal dynamic in terms of a dialectic of “*being* the phallus or *having* it”,¹⁰³ i.e., in terms of one’s position vis-à-vis the mother’s desire. What Freud called castration, i.e., the limiting of one’s access to the mother qua desired object, is seen by Lacan not as a threat or danger but, reversely, as a (reassuring) symbolic limit to the mother’s omnipotence. For this reason, this third pole is designated by Lacan as the *Name-of-the-Father* or *No-of-the-Father* (in French: *nom-du-père* and *non-du-père* respectively); and its function is called the *paternal function* (or metaphor).¹⁰⁴

As soon as it is installed, the network of signifiers obtains an anchoring point that supports the stability of the whole network. The Name-of-the-Father is the key in the whole process of stabilising a steady network of signifiers. If this is not established, then the stability is precarious. In Verhaeghe’s words, “we distinguish three different structures between the subject and the Other, each implying a specific way of being-in-language and a particular relation toward others.”¹⁰⁵

Fink explains that these three main diagnostic categories “are *structural* categories based on three fundamentally different mechanisms or what we might call three fundamentally different forms

¹⁰⁰ Verhaeghe, *On Being Normal*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰¹ Joël Dor, *The Clinical Lacan* (Nothvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1997), p. 16.

¹⁰² For what follows here see Freud, ‘The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex’.

¹⁰³ Dor, *The Clinical Lacan*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁴ See “Name-of-the-father” in Glowinski, Marks, and Murphy (eds.), *A Compendium of Lacanian Terms*, pp. 119-120.

¹⁰⁵ Verhaeghe, *On Being Normal*, p. 285.

of negation.”¹⁰⁶ If the unconscious, as discussed above, is the gap in any interconnection of signifiers, a gap that constitutes any subject as a divided subject, then in neurosis this split takes the form of repression (*Verdrängung*); in psychosis it takes the form of foreclosure (*Verwerfung*); and in perversion the form of disavowal (*Verleugnung*).¹⁰⁷

It would be outside the scope of this thesis to describe in full detail the intricacies of structural differentiation within a clinical analytic setting. The subject matter is vast and the available literature extensive.¹⁰⁸ It suffices here to say that contrary to medical practice (and expectations), the analytic setting involves situations “in which we cannot make stable inferences from psychic causes to symptomatic effects in the determination of a diagnosis”.¹⁰⁹

Theory of discourses

The theory of the discourses is introduced in Lacan’s teaching relatively late, in *Seminar XVII* (1969-70), as a solution to the question of the subject’s engagement within a signifying chain and with the symbolic Other. Lacan describes a discourse as a “necessary structure that goes well beyond speech ... It subsists in certain fundamental relations which would literally not be able to be maintained without language.”¹¹⁰ As he explains “the notion of discourse should be taken as a social link, founded on language.”¹¹¹ *Social link* or *social bond* (in French: *lien social*) is a term that Lacan had borrowed from Saussure, who used it to describe what constitutes the basis of a linguistic group.¹¹²

The basic structure of a discourse has, according to Lacan, four elements, laid out as two rows, comprising each of the positions of two distinct elements, or like the four corners of a square—its “legs”, as he puts it.¹¹³ It is an extension of a simpler structure representing Lacan’s definition of the signifier as that which represents the subject to another signifier. As we said earlier,¹¹⁴ This relation could be written schematically as:

$$\frac{S_1 \rightarrow S_2}{S}$$

This schema has only three legs, so Lacan suggests adding one more, at the bottom right corner, since, as he has explained elsewhere, “a quadripartite structure can always be required in a

¹⁰⁶ Bruce Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 76.

¹⁰⁷ See Glowinski, Marks, and Murphy (eds.), *A Compendium of Lacanian Terms*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Fink, *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Theory and Technique*; Dor, *The Clinical Lacan*; Verhaeghe, *On Being Normal*; Darian Leader, *What is Madness?* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2011).

¹⁰⁹ Dor, *The Clinical Lacan*, p. 10.

¹¹⁰ Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, pp. 12-13.

¹¹¹ *Seminar XX*, p. 17.

¹¹² “If we could embrace the sum of word-images stored in the minds of all individuals, we could identify the social bond that constitutes language.” Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, p. 13.

¹¹³ See Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, p. 14.

¹¹⁴ See above, p. 130.

construction of a subjective ordering.”¹¹⁵ This fourth leg he designates as object *a*, i.e., as the object that *causes* desire to emerge.¹¹⁶

$$\frac{S_1 \rightarrow S_2}{\S \quad a}$$

This formula “locates a moment,” Lacan explains:

It says that it is at the very instant at which S_1 intervenes in the already constituted field of the other signifiers, insofar as they are already articulated with one another as such, that, by intervening in another system, this \S which I have called the subject as divided, emerges. ... Finally, we have always stressed that something defined as a loss emerges from this trajectory. This is what the letter to be read as object *a* designates.¹¹⁷

The whole structure, therefore, represents both the way in which signifiers are interconnected within the subject’s own network of signifiers

$$S_1 \rightarrow S_2$$

as well as the way the subject is represented

$$\frac{S_1 \rightarrow S_2}{\S}$$

as well as the connection to the Other, in the social bond that speech installs

$$\frac{S_1 \rightarrow S_2}{\S \quad a}$$

In other words, it represents a *discourse*: The S_1 , the *master signifier*, is being connected to the signifying chain (S_2) and in this way the divided (or barred) subject emerges—or, to put it differently, the barred subject emerges at the moment that an agent (in this case S_1 , i.e., a master signifier) reaches out to the other (in this case S_2 , i.e., the already constituted field of the other signifiers). A discourse is established in reference to an object which is supposed to be at the side of the Other, and operates as the *cause* or *at stake*. This is Lacan’s *object a*.¹¹⁸ As Verhaeghe summarises, “The essence of discourse theory is as follows: *the lack of object, that is, the object (a), is both the cause and the condition of possibility of every symbolic system.*”¹¹⁹

The four legs of the formula can be described then in their utmost abstraction as follows:

$$\frac{\text{agent} \rightarrow \text{other}}{\text{truth} \quad \text{product/loss}}$$

These four places are implied in any speech act, i.e., in every discourse; what changes is the arrangement of the four letters.¹²⁰ The specific arrangement already described above is called the discourse of the master. It is, according to Lacan “a discourse that is already in the world and thus

¹¹⁵ Lacan, ‘Kant with Sade’, p. 653/774.

¹¹⁶ See above, pp. 117-117.

¹¹⁷ Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, p. 15.

¹¹⁸ See above, pp. 115-117.

¹¹⁹ Verhaeghe, *On Being Normal*, p. 57 (emphasis in the original).

¹²⁰ For a discussion of the quadripartite structure of the four discourses and its connection to Aristotle and Peirce see Etienne Oldenhove, ‘Carré Logique et Quadrant de Peirce’ *Le Bulletin Freudienne*, 11 (1989), 29-47.

underpins it, at least the one we are familiar with. Not only it is already inscribed in it, but it is one of its arches.”¹²¹ As Shingu points out,

Of the four discourses, the master discourse ... expresses the underlying relation between the subject and the signifier of the subject, and for this reason could almost be granted the status of the prototype—the fundamental form from which the other discourses derive.¹²²

It expresses, in other words, “not only the elementary structure of language, but also its imperative nature.”¹²³ The structure represented by this formula reflects a tension between what traditionally—and perhaps naively—would be described as *internal* and *external* in a subject’s psychic life.

From it, Lacan produces four other arrangements, or structures, each corresponding to a different kind of discourse, by applying an anti-clockwise quarter-turn operation. This is a purely formal operation, which Lacan stresses is not just accidental:

I have been speaking about this notorious quarter turn for long enough and on different occasions—in particular, ever since the appearance of what I wrote under the title ‘Kant with Sade’—for people to think ... that there are other reasons for this quarter turn than some pure accident of imaginary representation.¹²⁴

However, he says very little about those other reasons.¹²⁵

In any case, starting from the discourse of the master, and applying the anti-clockwise quarter-turn rotation once, we obtain the university discourse,

$$\frac{S_2}{S_1} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\S}$$

Then the analyst’s discourse,

$$\frac{a}{S_2} \rightarrow \frac{\S}{S_1}$$

and finally the hysteric’s discourse.

$$\frac{\S}{a} \rightarrow \frac{S_1}{S_2}$$

As can be seen, each of these four discourses is the inverse of another one of the four. The inverse of the master’s discourse, for example, is the discourse of the analyst (as implied by the original title of *Seminar XVII, L’envers de la psychanalyse*, where the four discourses are introduced), while the discourse of the hysteric is the inverse of the discourse of university.

¹²¹ Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, pp. 14–15.

¹²² Shingu, *Being Irrational*, p. 170.

¹²³ Glowinski, Marks, and Murphy (eds.), *A Compendium of Lacanian Terms*, p. 64.

¹²⁴ Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, p. 14. In *Kant with Sade* Lacan had constructed a schema with four place holders representing, as he explained, the Sadean phantasy. Further in the text he transformed it by a 90-degrees rotation. See ‘Kant with Sade’, pp. 653/774, 657/778.

¹²⁵ Bernard Burgoyne explains that Lacan has formulated this anti-clockwise rotation as the result of operations on vectors in a two-dimensional complex (“Argand”) plane. (*Discussion with author of 1 Jul. 2016*. Pers. comm.). It is possible that Lacan plays on the fact that operations involving complex numbers are symbolic operations on the complex plane that includes an axis of real numbers x with an axis of imaginary numbers iy , where $i = \sqrt{-1}$.

Lacan's discourse theory was readily adopted by researchers and theoreticians working in the fields of political theory and social and cultural studies, and a lot of important work has been produced as a result. The apparent simplicity of the four formulas, however, facilitated their uncritical adoption and application to all kinds of contexts in such a way that it has become very difficult to judge whether there was any merit in doing so. This was aided by the apparent clarity of the names Lacan chose for his four discourses. It might be tempting, for example, to mistake the master's discourse for a discourse of oppression, or to think that scientists engage in the university discourse, or even to believe that most neurotics—but not all of them—are operating within the hysteric's discourse. This, however, is not the case. Each discourse represents a manner of engagement with the symbolic order (or big Other), and not the structure of the social field facilitated by it. So, for example, As Mark Bracher explains,

the discourse of the Master promotes consciousness, synthesis and self-equivalence by instituting the dominance of master signifiers (S_1), which order knowledge (S_2) according to their own values and keep fantasy ($\$ \diamond a$) in a subordinate and repressed position.¹²⁶

The discourse of the university describes how, subjected “to a dominating totalised system of knowledge / belief (S_2), we are made to produce ourselves as (alienated) subjects.” The hysterical structure of discourse characterises “instances of resistance, protest and complaint ... [and] is in force whenever a discourse is dominated by a speaker's symptom”; and the discourse of the analyst “makes it possible to produce a master signifier that is a little less oppressive” because it is “produced by the subject rather than imposed upon the subject from the outside”.¹²⁷

Still, misconstructions were anticipated. Lacan says, for example:

My little quadrupedal schemas—I am telling you this today to alert you to it—are not the Ouija boards of history. It is not necessarily the case that things always happen this way, and that things rotate in the same direction. This is only an appeal for you to locate yourselves in relation to what one can call radical functions, in the mathematical sense of the term.¹²⁸

Lacan would prefer to leave open how his formulas are to be used, or how the rotation will operate, pointing out, however, that there is nothing deterministic in the transformation operation that produces the four discourses, i.e., there is no specific order or necessity in how they emerge. As Fink notes in this regard,

other discourses than the four discussed here could be generated by changing the *order* of the four mathemes used here. ... In effect, a total of twenty-four different discourses are possible using these four mathemes in the four different positions, and the fact that Lacan only mentions four discourses suggests that he finds something particularly important about the *order* of the elements.¹²⁹

Lacan gave no indication of what this important aspect might have been. The question was discussed by Oliver Feltham: What is it, he asked, that “determines the emergence of these ordered discourses

¹²⁶ Mark Bracher, ‘On the Psychological and Social Functions of Language: Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses’ in Mark Bracher et al. (eds.), *Lacanian Theory of Discourse: Subject, Structure, and Society* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 107-128, p. 117.

¹²⁷ ‘Lacan's Theory of the Four Discourses’, pp. 115, 122, 124.

¹²⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, p. 188. For the reference to radical functions, see above, p. 143n125.

¹²⁹ Fink, *Lacanian Subject*, p. 198n5.

such that there are four of them and four alone?”¹³⁰ Why not twenty-four, as the combinatory logic of the transformation would indicate? Feltham did also wonder about the historicity of the general structure of discourse. He concludes that “there is an absolute cut between each discourse, ... [i.e.,] each discourse emerges unique, and the emergence of the discourses is absolutely contingent. ... Any such transformation between systems is asystemic or astructural: there is no structural change.”¹³¹

From jouissance to the speaking body

Lacan’s introduction of the three registers—imaginary, symbolic, and real—and jouissance, which we have conceptualised as the effect of the world on the body in its structural couplings within this world,¹³² an effect that fuels these registers, makes it clear that a more careful consideration of the role of the body as such is needed. But first it would be necessary to clarify what we mean by this term “body”.

A basic, everyday sense of the term, the one provided by dictionaries for example, takes *body* to mean the complete physical structure of a human being or animal, comprising a head, a trunk, a neck, legs, arms, etc. There is no doubt that this description is valid for most intents and purposes as long as the body is taken to be an object in this world. This means to say that “body”—taken in its simple dictionary sense—is an ontic term. It’s clear to see, however, that an ontic term is not appropriate when one wants to consider phenomena like the ones studied by psychoanalysis; for to say that one “has” a body involves adopting, unexamined, an understanding of both the body as such (i.e., as an entity in this world), as well as what it means to be an embodied subject.

The body is a construction, namely a signifier referring to a collection of signifiers that obtains a place in the human world by its interconnections to other signifiers and collections of signifiers; but is also the agent through which signifiers are possible. The biological body—the organism—is a prerequisite of everything discussed until now. It’s only because we have a body—a biological body—that there can be jouissance, and that the register of the real can be populated. But this biological body needs to be contrasted to the body we talk about when we consider our bodily existence as speaking beings—our *language body*, so to speak. As Colette Soler writes:

One is not born with a body. In other words, the body is not primary. The living being is not the body. ... There is a distinction to be made between the organism, i.e., the living being, on the one hand, and that which, on the other hand, is called the body.¹³³

In a similar vein, Rik Loose explains:

¹³⁰ Oliver Feltham, ‘Enjoy your Stay: Structural Change in *Seminar XVII*’ in Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg (eds.), *Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 179–194, p. 179.

¹³¹ ‘Structural Change’, p. 190.

¹³² See above, p. 108 and 108n111.

¹³³ Colette Soler, ‘The Body in the Teaching of Jacques Lacan’ *Journal of the Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research*, 6 (1995), 6–38, p. 7.

What is a human body? A human body is a 'reality'. However, we are not born with the reality of the body, but as a living organism or real body ... The only reality we have is the reality of language and if our body is a reality then it is a body of language.¹³⁴

Human beings obtain a body—i.e., a language body—through their introduction to language. In the words of Lissy Canellopoulos, "To make a body, we need an organism, language and the image. These three dimensions—the real, the symbolic and the imaginary—are tied together by the Borromean knot, constituting the act of the subject."¹³⁵ Language, as it was indicated earlier, comprises an articulated network of signifierised jouissance. It's because these elements of signifierised jouissance qua signifiers point to other signifiers that the human being can keep the as yet non-signifierised jouissance under control: the network of signifiers is being installed, and more and more of this non-signifierised jouissance becomes a part of it—that is, becomes increasingly signifierised. In the beginning, the body is experienced as fragmented and chaotic—the source of unsignifierised jouissance, i.e., anxiety. It only starts becoming whole via a process that Lacan described under the rubric of the *mirror stage*. But, as he writes,

This illusion of unity, in which a human being is always looking forward to self-mastery, entails a constant danger of sliding back again into the chaos from which he started; it hangs over the abyss of a dizzy Assent in which one can perhaps see the very essence of Anxiety.¹³⁶

Jouissance becomes channelled and controllable only through a series of imaginary identifications and symbolic signifierisations, the result of which is the construction of an imaginary body and of a corresponding *symbolic body* made of linguistic signifiers. In Loose's words, "the body is a coating of the real of the organism and its organs with the material of an image."¹³⁷ It is in this sense that we can say that the language body is very different from the biological body. And it is in this sense that Lacan says that "thought is jouissance."¹³⁸ It is hard to overestimate the philosophical implications of this assertion: If signifiers stem from jouissance, and if all thought *is* jouissance, then the traditional philosophical concept of *being* loses its place. At least in Lacan's view. As he says, he opposes to this *being*, "the being of signifieriness."¹³⁹

The emergence of this symbolic, or *language*, body, as it could also be called, is at the heart of a myriad clinical and non-clinical phenomena, ranging widely in severity and urgency: from severe cases of schizophrenia and catatonia, to bodily dissociations, eating disorders, or addictions; from gender discomfort, or body dysmorphic syndromes, to hysterical conversions or various other psychosomatic ailments; and so on and so forth.¹⁴⁰ What all these have in common is the fact that the body of the speaking being is marked and transformed by the symbolic in ways that go far beyond the

¹³⁴ Loose, *Subject of Addiction*, p. 179.

¹³⁵ Lissy Canellopoulos, 'The bodily event, jouissance and the (post)modern subject' *Recherches en psychanalyse* 2:10 (2010): 321a-328a; <www.cairn.info/revue-recherches-en-psychanalyse-2010-2-page-321a.htm>, accessed 18 May 2016.

¹³⁶ Lacan, 'Some Reflections on the Ego', p. 15.

¹³⁷ Loose, *Subject of Addiction*, p. 180.

¹³⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p. 70.

¹³⁹ *Seminar XX*, p. 71.

¹⁴⁰ For a discussion see Paul Verhaeghe, 'Subject and Body: Lacan's Struggle with the Real' in Paul Verhaeghe, *Beyond Gender: From Subject to Drive* (New York: Other Press, 2001), 65-97.

limits imposed by biology as such. In fact, introduction to the symbolic may have influenced human phylogeny itself.¹⁴¹ It is as if the body presents the human being qua subject (of language) with an insoluble enigma. The question is far broader from what a simplistic understanding of the important biological and other physiological issues at hand would entail. Questions of survival, sustenance, and procreation are common to all living beings qua living beings. You would not have to be concerned about them. As a human being, considered as a living being, you would behave in such way as to “guarantee” life to the greatest extent possible. But as a human being considered as a speaking being, or *parlêtre*, as Lacan puts it,¹⁴² you are concerned about what is happening, because everything that *is* happening—your world, your environment, your body as well—is a potential signifier. In other words, it is not speaking alone that establishes the speaking being qua *parlêtre*, but the network of signifiers—i.e., language, or the big Other.¹⁴³ Your body as a signifier represents you qua subject to another signifier. It’s not just about *doing something* as such with your body; it’s the further issue, What does it mean to have a body? What is the meaning of the body? In reference to what is this meaning established?

The question of the body brings us now to the question of sexualisation.

The question of sexualisation

The term sexualisation “refers to how the speaking being comes to acquire a sexual position from which to engage in a sexuality that never offers complete satisfaction. ... Sexualisation involves a choice, whereby a subject positions him— or herself within a particular sex.”¹⁴⁴ The question bothered Freud from the very early days of his teaching—when he spoke, for example, about the “polymorphously perverse disposition” of children and tried to account for the differentiation between men and women; or later,

¹⁴¹ This could allow us to understand how it became possible for human infants to be born “prematurely”. Researchers estimate that human gestation period should be at least double if the human infant was to be born at a neurological development stage comparable to that of a chimpanzee. Even though there is no consensus in regards to why this is the case, there are those who argue that it might be connected to the fact that humans are “cultural animals”. See Kate Wong, ‘Why Humans Give Birth to Helpless Babies’ *Scientific American* (28 Aug. 2012), [Blog], <<http://blogs.scientificamerican.com/observations/why-humans-give-birth-to-helpless-babies/>>, accessed 11 Jun. 2016. In any case, it would never be possible for such short gestation period, with all it entails, to be the case, if there were no social structures that would provide a safe environment for the infant for the period just after birth until the age of 2 to 3 years old.

¹⁴² *Parlêtre* is a Lacanian neologism, introduced during *Seminar XXII*, and comprising the words speak and being (in French: *parl(er)+être*), meant to draw attention to the fact that the human being is one of “these beings who do not speak simply to be, but which are so by being [parlêtres]”. Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXII: RSI [1974-75]*, trans. Cormac Gallagher (Unauthorised translation from unpublished manuscript: www.lacaninireland.com), p. 34.

¹⁴³ Cf. in this connection what Lacan says about his dog: “I have a dog ... My dog, in my sense and without ambiguity, speaks. My dog has without any doubt the gift of speech. This is important, because it does not mean that she possesses language totally. ... What distinguishes this speaking animal from what happens because of the fact that man speaks ... is that, contrary to what happens in the case of man in so far as he speaks, she never takes me for another. ... By taking you for another, [a] subject puts you at the level of the Other with a big O. It is precisely this which is lacking to my dog: for her there is only the small other. As regards the big Other, it does not seem that her relationship to language gives her access to it.” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book IX: Identification [1961-62]*, trans. Cormac Gallagher (Unauthorised translation from unpublished manuscript: www.lacaninireland.com), pp. 21-22.

¹⁴⁴ Glowinski, Marks, and Murphy (eds.), *A Compendium of Lacanian Terms*, p. 173.

when he acknowledged the differing and complicated trajectories of men and women in their attempts to obtain and occupy their respective sexual identity.¹⁴⁵

In a Lacanian understanding of the issues, the starting point is *jouissance*. *Jouissance*, understood as the effect of the world on the body, is undifferentiated: *Jouissance One*. But as soon as the signifier is established, something changes: The human being obtains what we referred to earlier as a *symbolic* body and occupies, as a *sexed being*, a position related to this symbolic body. What we call *male* and *female* are constructs of language—and not categories of biology:

Assuredly, what appears on bodies in the enigmatic form of sexual characteristics—which are merely secondary—makes sexed beings. No doubt. But *being* is the *jouissance* of the body as such, that is, as asexual because what is known as sexual *jouissance* is marked and dominated by the impossibility of establishing as such, anywhere in the enunciable, the sole One that interests us, the One of the relation ‘sexual relationship’ (*rapport sexuel*).¹⁴⁶

Which is to say that the sexual relationship is impossible not because there are no human beings engaging in sexual activities but rather that what we refer to as a sexual relationship is a relationship between linguistic—i.e., symbolic—constructs:

Has it not occurred to you that this ‘sexual reality’ ... is specified in man in this, that there is no instinctual relation between male and female? ... Man—when man is to be spoken about, I shout out—should be ok just to dream about it. He should be ok just to dream about it because it is quite certain that ... *The woman* doesn’t exist. There are women, of course, but *The woman* is but a dream of man.¹⁴⁷

The signifierisation of (some of the) *jouissance* imposes a differentiation between *phallic* *jouissance* and *other*. The first is linked to the phallus, and hence to the signifier and to signification as such, while the other is linked to what is beyond that what can be signified. After the phallus has been introduced, phallic *jouissance* obtains a special position.¹⁴⁸ In Lacan’s words:

To one of these beings qua sexed, to man insofar as he is endowed with the organ said to be phallic—I said, ‘said to be’—the corporal sex or sexual organ of woman—I said, ‘of woman’, whereas in fact *woman* does not exist, woman is *not whole*—woman’s sexual organ doesn’t tell him anything, except via the body’s *jouissance*. ... Analytic experience attests precisely to the fact that everything revolves around phallic *jouissance*, in that woman is defined by a position that I have indicated as ‘not whole’ with respect to phallic *jouissance*. ... Phallic *jouissance* is the obstacle owing to which man does not come, I would say, to enjoy woman’s body, precisely because what he enjoys is the *jouissance* of the organ.¹⁴⁹

As Fink explains, men are “wholly alienated within language” and “completely determined by the phallic function”. Women, on the other hand, are “not altogether subject to the symbolic order”;

¹⁴⁵ See for example, Freud, ‘Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality’, pp. 109, 141-144; also ‘Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes’; and ‘Femininity’ in ‘New Introductory Lectures’, pp. 145-169.

¹⁴⁶ Lacan, *Seminar XX*, pp. 6-7. Lacan refers to his comment in *Seminar XVII* about *rapport sexuel*: “What the master’s discourse uncovers is that there is no sexual relation”. *Seminar XVII*, p. 116. Perhaps a less misleading translation would be that there is no relation between the sexes (rather than “no sexual relation”).

¹⁴⁷ ‘Conférence à Genève sur le Symptôme’ [1975] *Le Bloc-notes de la psychanalyse*, 5 (1985), 5-23, p. 15 (my translation).

¹⁴⁸ See Glowinski, Marks, and Murphy (eds.), *A Compendium of Lacanian Terms*, p. 175.

¹⁴⁹ Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p. 7 (translation slightly altered).

for women “the phallic function has its limits” and “the signifier isn’t everything.”¹⁵⁰ Lacan provides a schema that represents this configuration in Lesson VII of Seminar XX (see Figure 2).

The two formulas on the left-hand side represent the male state of affairs, while the two on the right represent the female state of affairs.¹⁵¹ Transcribed in plain English, the two formulas for men say something like: every x (i.e., every man) is inscribed in the phallic function ($\forall x \Phi x$) provided that there is a limit to that function, i.e., that there is at least one *other* x who is *not* bound by it ($\exists x \overline{\Phi x}$). This is nothing very new, really. The formulas represent Lacan’s understanding of the paternal function, that is, castration: every subject is submitted to the phallic function as long as there is a master who is above it, sets the law—namely, the *name-* (or the *no-*) *of-the-father*—and imposes it by threat of castration.

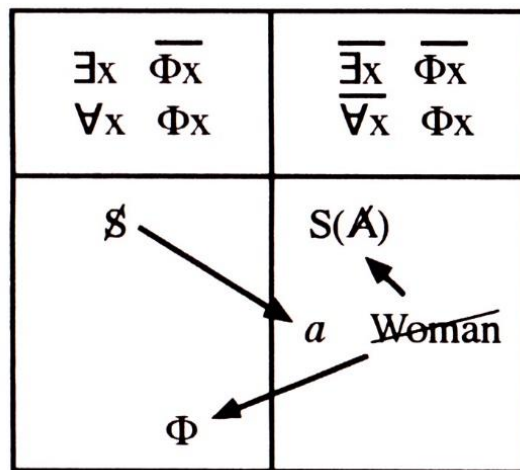


Figure 2: Lacan’s formulas of sexuation
(Source: Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p. 78)

The two formulas on the female side tell a somewhat different story. The starting point for the female subject is that there is an ambivalence about the limit to the phallic function. Jouissance is not limited to being merely phallic because—or *since*—there isn’t one x who is not subjected to it ($\overline{\exists x \Phi x}$). If there was one such x , then it would play the role of the omnipotent master, and then the jouissance of the subject qua *female* would *have* to be under the phallic function (i.e., operating under the threat of castration). That would then bring this particular subject to the male side. To say that for women jouissance is not all phallic is equivalent to saying that the *not whole* of woman is under the phallic function ($\overline{\forall x \Phi x}$)—“not whole” being the content of the rather uncommon notation $\overline{\forall}$.¹⁵²

The lower part of the schema describes the position of men and women in connection to desire. Man, qua divided subject, aims at object a , which represents the function that causes his desire; it is

¹⁵⁰ Fink, *Lacanian Subject*, pp. 106–107.

¹⁵¹ It should be reminded here that this discussion has nothing to do with the biological sex as such. The symbol x represents in both formulas a human being with no reference to his or her biological sex.

¹⁵² Cf. Lacan: “I write $\overline{\forall x \Phi x}$, a never-before-seen function in which the negation is placed on the quantifier, which should be read ‘not-whole’”. *Seminar XX*, p. 72.

in this sense that we can think of male *jouissance* as phallic *jouissance*, i.e., *jouissance* of the organ. On other side, the woman, written in this crossed-out way to indicate that the woman doesn't exist, aims at either Φ (which indicates the symbolic phallus) or $S(\bar{A})$ (a notation indicating the master signifier, alternative to S_1).

This very abstract formulation and its explanation are not intended to be read as some kind of magic mathematical recipe that sorts out the question of sexuation once and for all. It is, however, intended to provide some understanding of this very complicated state of affairs. Lacan's position is grounded on Freud's own: just like Freud, Lacan takes the castration complex as his starting point; just like Freud, Lacan recognises that being a man or a woman is not a question of biology. Lacan takes one more step by introducing the symbolic dimension of sexuation—that is, by approaching the question of the human being as a sexed being in terms of the signifier. The concept of *jouissance* plays a most important role here. Being at the source of signification, *jouissance*, which can also be understood here in the narrower sense of sexual *enjoyment* and has no direct equivalent in Freud, allows Lacan to discern more clearly the distinction between *phallic* *jouissance* and *other*—and thus to show in a concrete manner how the complexities of female sexuality could be approached.

Lacan's formulas of sexuation have continued to be baffling ever since he first introduced them. Fink, for example writes: "We need not assume that there is some sort of complete unity or consistency to his [Lacan's] work, for he adds to and changes things as he goes along."¹⁵³ Be that as it may, the most important aspect of Lacan's conceptualisation is his determination to thematise in a structural, i.e., ontological manner, the question of sexual difference.¹⁵⁴

Borromean clinic

Just like Freud, who used schemata as simpler illustrations of complex ideas from as early as in his *Interpretation of Dreams* up to *The Ego and the Id* and later,¹⁵⁵ Lacan's concern was also to come up with appropriate schematic representations of his theoretical models. In contrast to Freud, however, whose topography, at least according to Lacan, was "not free of awkwardness",¹⁵⁶ Lacan seemed to be reading much more in his schemas. He had been thinking for some time that topology offers a "non-metaphorical" way of exploring psychic structures. His hypothesis, as we shall see, was that there is a homeomorphism between the actual phenomena he is studying and his topological models, and that it is, therefore, possible to use them heuristically.

As discussed earlier, the three registers of human subjectivity—imaginary, symbolic, and real—are linked to each other, with the imaginary and the symbolic emerging, so to speak, from the real, i.e., the register of the effects of the world on the body. They are all dependent on each other, interconnected, in a psychic whole. The challenge, for Lacan, was to find a way to model this

¹⁵³ Cf. here Fink, 'Knowledge and Jouissance', p. 40.

¹⁵⁴ In contrast to Heidegger, for example, who postulated the ontological neutrality of the Dasein, accepted the ontic reality of sexual difference, but was not able to speak about ontologically about it. See above, pp. 54-56.

¹⁵⁵ See for example, Freud, 'The Interpretation of Dreams', pp. 686, 687, 690; and also 'The Ego and the Id', p. 363.

¹⁵⁶ Lacan, 'Overture', p. 18.

interconnection and interdependence, and to represent it schematically. Lacan was trying to account for two seemingly contradictory features of the three registers: the first is that they all share their origin in unsignified jouissance; the second, that they become distinct from each other up to the point where because of the paternal function they emerge as three completely independent entities.

In 1972, Lacan came up with the idea that the three registers are intertwined like rings forming a knot. He had a specific kind of knot in mind, called *Borromean*, since it was found on the coat of arms of the Borromeo medieval banking family.¹⁵⁷ The Borromean knot, which very possibly symbolises the Holy Trinity, comprises three rings not tied with each other in any way, but linked so that if one of them is cut, all of them become free. Applying this configuration to the three registers, Lacan envisaged them as linked in such a way that if one of them is “cut”, all of them become separated—even though not one of them is tied with any other in any way (see Figure 3, left).

The first question, however, remained: if the three registers appear as separate rings, how can we present schematically their common origin? In *Seminar XXIII* Lacan suggested that the Borromean knot begins as a ring that is gradually looped around itself before becoming a kind of a chain, out of

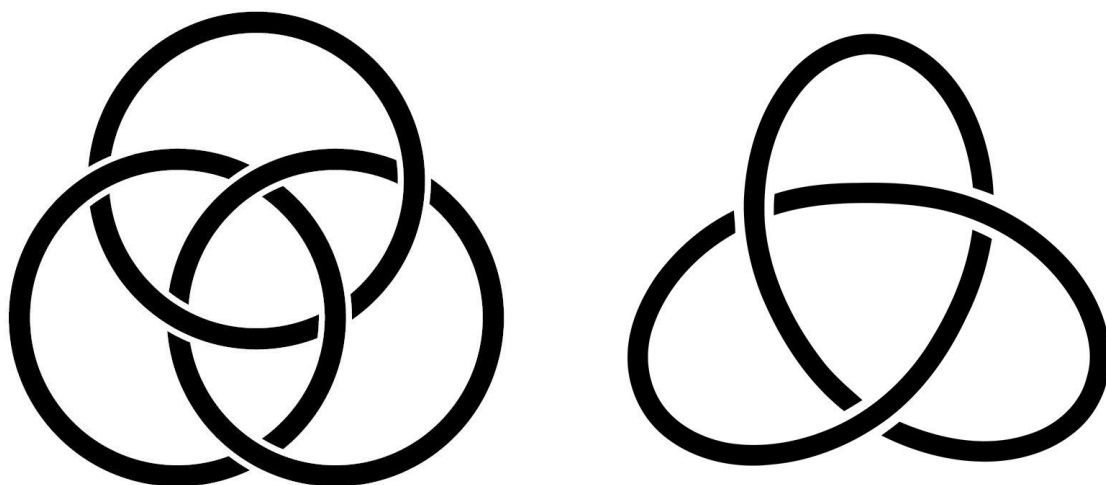


Figure 3: Borromean Knot (left) and Trefoil Knot (right)
(Source: Wikimedia Commons / Public Domain)

which a so-called Trefoil Knot (Figure 3, right) is eventually generated.

In most people the symbolic, the imaginary and the real have become intertwined to the point that each forms a continuation of the other, for want of any operation that would set them apart as in the link of the Borromean knot—of what is claimed to be a Borromean know, because the Borromean knot is not a knot, it's a link. [If this is true,] why not grasp that each of these loops continues in the next in a way that is strictly indistinct?¹⁵⁸

This particular transformation is not a straightforward one, since the trefoil knot has three crossings while the original ring has a crossing number of zero. It is even less easy to see how the transformation of the trefoil knot into a Borromean can happen. As Lacan was ready to admit:

¹⁵⁷ For the background of Lacan's becoming interested in it in 1972, see Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, pp. 363-364.

¹⁵⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XXIII*, p. 71.

I have told you, that this theory of knots is in its infancy, is extremely clumsy. And as it is fabricated, there are many cases where at the sight of simple figures such as the ones that I have made for you on the board, you could not in any way give an explanation for the fact, whether yes or no, the tangle that you have drawn is or is not a knot, whatever may be the conventions that you have given yourself in advance to account for the knot as such. The fact is moreover that there is something that is worth dwelling on. Is it because of an intuition?¹⁵⁹

Complications and uncertainties notwithstanding, the picture Lacan is drawing is an elegant one. Beginning from one “ring” comprising unsignified jouissance, a structuring process takes place that allows a final Borromean configuration to emerge. But then how can we include in this picture our understanding of clinical structures? For example, what is the Borromean equivalent of the differentiation between psychosis and neurosis, or of the three forms of negation about which we spoke earlier? Psychosis is understood as a failure of the paternal function; if the paternal function is the function that guarantees the separation of the three Borromean rings from each other, then psychosis can be understood in terms of an instability of the Borromean knot. In psychosis, the knot *can* be unravelled; in neurosis, this is not possible. In order to account for those cases where a triggering of psychosis appears imminent but is somehow staved off, Lacan suggested that there might be something that can keep the Borromean knot together. He called it *sinthome* (in French: *sintôme*, an older spelling of the word *symptôme*, or symptom) and pictured it as an additional ring that would hold the other three together.

According to Lacan, the sinthome occupies for psychotics a place similar to the place the neurotic symptom occupies for neurotics—i.e., it is an attempt at a cure. Lacan chose the older spelling to indicate that the psychotic sinthome is more primordial than the neurotic symptom and undergoes different vicissitudes. As Lacan says, “I have allowed myself to define as a sinthome that which enables the trefoil knot, not to go on forming a trefoil knot, but rather to maintain itself in a position that *looks like* it is forming a trefoil knot.”¹⁶⁰ The form of this additional ring (the sinthome) is, as its name implies, circumstantial—in the sense that the way it can manage to preserve the knot can vary widely from individual to individual.

The introduction of the sinthome raises a number of questions in connection to clinical practice. A neurotic symptom is situated somewhere in the three registers, and can be taken as a cipher to be deciphered. As Lacan points out, for the neurotic subject “there is consistency between the symptom and the unconscious. Except for the fact that the symptom cannot be defined otherwise than by the way in which each one enjoys the unconscious in so far as the unconscious determines it.”¹⁶¹ A psychotic subject, on the other hand, is as if it does *not* have an analysable symptom. It will *not* recognise a symptom as a cipher, and will not be able to engage with any invitation by an analyst to decipher it. The sinthome, understood as what holds the three registers together, is thought of as situated outside the three registers as such, and is for that reason unreachable by any discourse. For all intents and purposes, then, the psychotic subject is unreachable by analysis. With a psychotic, it would perhaps be preferable to talk of a *treatment* instead of analysis. This is how Jean-Louis Gault puts it:

¹⁵⁹ *Seminar XXII*, p. 40.

¹⁶⁰ *Seminar XXIII*, p. 77.

¹⁶¹ *Seminar XXII*, p. 98.

In neurosis, the point is to decipher the symptoms, moving from the symbolic to the real. It is this deciphering that the very word 'analysis' aims at. In psychosis, on the contrary, the idea is to go from the real to the symbolic, and to construct a symptom. This is where the term 'treatment' is justified.¹⁶²

Further questions could be raised in connection to its applicability: are *sinthomes* restricted to psychotic subjects or is there a space to think of them as concepts relevant to neurotics as well? Is the concept really useful at all? Is it justified? Is it necessary?

Such questions bring us to the more general issue of the status of mathematical and topological formalisation in Lacan's work.

A method of discovery or of exposition?

During the later years of his teaching, Lacan became more and more engrossed by topology and especially by the theory of knots. As Dany Nobus writes, attendees at his seminars would see him spending

hours and hours weaving ends of rope and drawing complicated diagrams on small pieces of paper. ... During his seminar of 1978-79 he even silenced his own voice in favour of the practice of writing and drawing, treating his audience to the speechless creation of intricate knots on the blackboard.¹⁶³

This labour did not produce very specific fruits. Many dismissed this topological period of his teaching altogether, or interpreted it as a metaphor—a prop for the imagination, as it were. Joël Dor, for example, has argued that Lacan's "idiosyncratic use of these topological objects involves a metaphorical illustration" and that "even if they do not constitute the proof of a *mathematisation* of psychoanalytic theory" they can support "the idea of a *matheme* allowing for the transmission of psychoanalysis."¹⁶⁴ Jacques-Alain Miller, on the other hand, disagrees, insisting that for Lacan topology "is not metaphor, it represents a structure."¹⁶⁵ Drawing on Lacan's texts from throughout his teaching, Miller points out that for Lacan his schemas were never considered to be illustrations. Topological objects always represent or show something.¹⁶⁶ Still others, like David Corfield, have been negative:

Lacan never reached the point where his symbolisation could provide sufficient guidance to further theory construction. The symbolisation never put up any resistance to its author's intentions, and so his theory has not been able to achieve the kind of liberation from authorship we see in the mathematical sciences.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Jean-Louis Gault, 'Two Statues of the Symptom: Let Us Turn to Finn Again' in Véronique Voruz and Bogdan Wolf (eds.), *The Later Lacan: An Introduction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 73-82, p. 79.

¹⁶³ Dany Nobus, 'Lacan's Science of the Subject: Between Linguistics and Topology' in Jean-Michel Rabaté (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 50-68, p. 63.

¹⁶⁴ Joël Dor, 'The Epistemological Status of Lacan's Mathematical Paradigms', trans. Pablo Nagel, in David Pettigrew and François Raffoul (eds.), *Disseminating Lacan* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 109-121, pp. 117, 120.

¹⁶⁵ Jacques-Alain Miller, 'Mathemes: Topology in the Teaching of Lacan', trans. Mahlon Stoutz, in Ellie Ragland and Dragan Milovanovic (eds.), *Lacan: Topologically Speaking* (New York: Other Press, 2004), 28-48, p. 35.

¹⁶⁶ See 'Mathemes: Topology in the Teaching of Lacan', pp. 34-35.

¹⁶⁷ David Corfield, 'From Mathematics to Psychology: Lacan's Missed Encounters' in Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis (eds.), *Lacan & Science* (London: Karnac, 2002), 179-206, p. 189.

In a Q&A session during *Seminar XI*, a member of the audience asked Lacan: “Is topology for you a method of discovery or of exposition?” Lacan responded: “It is the mapping of the topology proper to our experience as analysts, which may later be taken in a metaphysical perspective.”¹⁶⁸ Admittedly this is a rather vague response.

Confronted with a similar question some years later, however, Lacan was less vague:

[Q] May I ask if this fundamental arithmetic and this topology are not in themselves a myth or merely at best an analogy for an explanation of the life of the mind?

[A] Analogy to what? ‘S’ designates something which can be written exactly as this S. And I have said that the ‘S’ which designates the subject is instrument, matter, to symbolise a loss. A loss that you experience as a subject (and myself too). ... Where is the analogon? Either this loss exists or it doesn’t exist. If it exists it is only possible to designate the loss by a system of symbols. In any case, the loss does not exist before this symbolisation indicates its place. It is not an analogy. ... It is not even an abstraction, because an abstraction is some sort of diminution of reality, and I think it is reality itself.¹⁶⁹

In other words, Lacan makes it very clear here that for him the existence of topology, as a system of symbols and relations between symbols, is of the same order as the existence of the subject of language: indeed, the subject of language is a symbol as well, a symbol of a loss. When we speak about reality or about the human being as a divided subject, we are referring to constructions that already belong to the order of the symbolic. In this sense, Lacan argues here that there is a homeomorphism between two structured systems, one being what we describe as psychic reality, the other being topology.

This hypothesis of a homeomorphism between structures of the psyche and structures of mathematics has been taken up by psychoanalysts and mathematicians. Bernard Burgoyne, for example, works on the hypothesis that clinical phenomena can be studied in terms of topology and topological spaces. He credits the Hungarian psychoanalyst Imre Hermann as the originator of the idea that psychical structure has its parallel in the domain of mathematics, and adds that Lacan knew of Hermann’s work.¹⁷⁰ Burgoyne argues for a homology—or parallelism—between the domain of mathematics and the domain of what he calls *sexual love*. As he explains, the strong version of this “parallelism thesis” appears in one of two forms:

(I) for all structures in the domain of mathematics (where a structure is a number of sentences together with their consequences) there exists a corresponding structure in the domain of sexual love; and (II) for all structures in the domain of sexual love, there exists a corresponding structure in the domain of mathematics.¹⁷¹

An example would be the Freudian theory of defence, which, according to Burgoyne, “can now be tested, in terms of the differentiations of structure that it proposes, by means of structures of separation in topological spaces.”¹⁷² Burgoyne writes that “we know four themes where such relations

¹⁶⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XI*, p. 90.

¹⁶⁹ ‘Of Structure’, pp. 195–196.

¹⁷⁰ See Bernard Burgoyne, ‘Autism and Topology’ in Bernard Burgoyne (ed.), *Drawing the Soul: Schemas and Models in Psychoanalysis* (London: Karnac, 2000), 190–217; and ‘Place in Love’.

¹⁷¹ ‘Place in Love’, p. 251. Burgoyne is using the term *sexual love* in direct reference to “the oedipal conflict—the sexual love of childhood”. *Email of 3 Mar. 2013* (pers. comm.).

¹⁷² ‘Autism and Topology’, p. 212.

between psychoanalysis and mathematics exist” involving “the concepts of connectivity, compactness, order relation, and separation”.¹⁷³

Mathematic formalisation and discourse

All thinking and discussion about the speaking being, the *parlêtre*, takes place in language. But if, following Lacan, we see language as a construction, as a network of signifiers, i.e., signifierised *jouissance*, which the speaking being is subjected to, and if we understand that the meanings of words—i.e., the network of signifieds—is loosely applied to the network of signifiers, which means that the meaning of words are floating, malleable, changeable, then language cannot “escape” itself. It is not able to stand beside itself and study itself. How is it possible, then, to develop a formalisation that would break through the confines of the signifier and play the role of a metalanguage, if, as Lacan asserts, *there is no metalanguage*?

Lacan, as we saw, turned to mathematics. He claimed that the problems of psychoanalysis are formalisable and that the tool to study them is mathematics. Admittedly, his approach to mathematics was far removed from what one ordinarily associates with this term, but still it was mathematics. Lacan allowed himself a liberty in adopting, manipulating, and reinterpreting mathematical notation or conventions, a liberty that has confused many of his readers, both followers and opponents. Lacan always presented himself as bemused (or slightly amused) by their confusion and only occasionally appeared less certain. In 1975, for example, during a visit to the United States, he stated, “I have tried to condense, to formulate as regards our practice something that would be coherent. It has led me to wild imaginings that worry me a lot.”¹⁷⁴ In general, he did not show any willingness to change his approach in any way.¹⁷⁵

Lacan thought of mathematics as “just” a process of manipulating letters on a piece of paper, according to certain rules for their exchanges, transformations, and arrangements. Mathematics alone could obey the rules of the symbolic order, with the added privilege that they do not depend on the imaginary individualities of the people involved:

What is at stake for us is to obtain a model of mathematical formalisation. Formalisation is nothing other than the substitution of what is called a letter for any number of ones. ... Whatever the number of ones you place under each of those letters, you are subject to a certain number of laws—laws of grouping, addition, multiplication etc. ... Mathematization alone reaches a real—and it is in that respect that it is compatible with our discourse, analytic discourse—a real that has nothing to do with what traditional knowledge has served as a basis for, which is not what the latter believes it to be—namely reality—but rather fantasy.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ ‘Place in Love’, pp. 251, 257n53.

¹⁷⁴ Lacan, quoted in Marini, *Lacan*, p. 242.

¹⁷⁵ See for example Lacan’s ironic comments about the confused use by two of his pupils of his metaphor formula as if it was a formula of ordinary algebra in Lacan, ‘Preface’, p. xii. For a more extended discussion of Lacan’s use of mathematic notation, especially in connection to criticisms by A. Sokal and J. Brickmond, see Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis, ‘Postures and Impostures: on Lacan’s Style and Use of Mathematical Science’ in Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis (eds.), *Lacan & Science* (London: Karnac, 2002), 207–229.

¹⁷⁶ Lacan, *Seminar XX*, pp. 130–131.

Mathematisation, in the sense that Lacan understood the term, is not supposed to give us access to reality, as a more traditional understanding of the concepts involved might have wanted it. It is not because “the great book of the universe is written in mathematical language,” as Galileo argued,¹⁷⁷ that Lacan was seeking mathematical formalisation; it’s rather the access it gives to the real—i.e., to the registry out of which the imaginary and the symbolic are formed. Lacan did not claim the self-adequacy of mathematics. In his view, mathematics always needed language:

No formalization of language is transmissible without the use of language itself. It is in the very act of speaking that I make this formalization, this ideal metalanguage, ex-sist. It is in this respect that the symbolic cannot be confused with being—far from it.¹⁷⁸

In contrast to Galileo’s, then, Lacan’s approach was not Platonic. Mathematical entities are not thought of as existing independently of the humans using them; mathematical entities were not thought of as comprising the deeper structure of the world—or of the human psyche, for that matter. It is only by speaking that the knots, schemas, or formulae that Lacan introduces stand outside their imaginary or symbolic register.

We would need to refer here once more to Hintikka’s work—a work in the philosophy of logic and mathematics—and point out an important similarity that it has to Lacan’s.¹⁷⁹ Both Lacan and Hintikka were faced with a metalanguage-related problem. Lacan understood that there is no metalanguage and needed a different way to secure the foundations of psychoanalysis; Hintikka wanted to free logic and mathematics from the severe limitations of Tarski’s “impossibility result”, which, as he explained, states that “a truth definition can be given for a language only in a stronger metalanguage.”¹⁸⁰ Both Lacan and Hintikka chose to see their respective problems in terms of a language, or a semantic, game, or, more generally, in terms of a *discourse*—the term taken here in the sense of a *series of utterances*, i.e., *sayings*.

Even though there is no metalanguage, one can speak; discourse reveals truth. It reveals *Being* as well. As Lacan explains,

when I say [there is no metalanguage], it apparently means—no language of *being*. But is there *being*? ... What I say is what there isn’t. *Being* is, as they say, and *nonbeing* is not. There is or there isn’t. *Being* is merely presumed in certain words—‘individual’, for instance, and ‘substance’. In my view, it is but a fact of what is said.¹⁸¹

In short, mathematics *only subsists if we employ it*. Mathematics is a fact of what is said. Just as *being*.

Lacan’s position here is remarkably close to Heidegger’s when we see him claiming that “Language is the house of *being*”,¹⁸² the main difference between the two being that Heidegger refers to language in an ontological sense, while for Lacan language is material, bodily, *corporeal*.

¹⁷⁷ Galileo, quoted in Milner, ‘The Doctrine of Science’, p. 41.

¹⁷⁸ Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p. 119.

¹⁷⁹ For Hintikka see above, pp. 133-135

¹⁸⁰ Hintikka, *Principles*, p. 15.

¹⁸¹ Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p. 118.

¹⁸² Heidegger, ‘Letter on Humanism’, p. 239.

Lacan refers to *saying*—the term understood literally, i.e., as the *action* of articulation, with all the movements of the throat, the mouth, the lips involved.¹⁸³ *Saying*, seen thus, is always something that pertains to the imaginary register: saying, as such, is inadequate to grasp the phenomena at hand on its own. It obeys an internal logic, namely the logic of the chain of signifiers. But it also *reveals* this logic, it makes it visible.

To put it a different way, both Lacan and Hintikka coincide in their insight that only a *discourse* can allow truth, time, and *being* to ex-sist, without making necessary the resort to metalanguage.

This brings the question of an apparent circularity to the fore. The human being is not in language from the beginning. Lacan's claim is that language plays a fundamental role in opening up the world for the human being, and that the law of the signifier—or, in a more general sense, a discourse—is imposed on any engagement with what is at stake. How is it possible, then, to use language to formulate a discourse *in lieu* of a metalanguage, to avoid falling into the trap of conceptual circularity? This is the exact same problem of the *circle of understanding* that Heidegger had encountered. There is indeed a circle involved when one needs to use language in order to speak about the introduction of the human being to language. There is no way one can avoid this circularity, and in fact, as Heidegger has argued, in trying to avoid it one “misses the decisive issue here, which is an insight into the centre of the circle as such ... for the centre only manifests itself as such as we circle around it.”¹⁸⁴ Rather than a circle, it would be better thought of and considered as a spiral. Some concepts need to be introduced or defined from the beginning—such are, for example, *jouissance* and the real. Using these concepts, then, one can get a clearer view of the phenomena in question, which in turn will allow one to return to the original concepts and define them better.

This problem, however, has a further aspect. If we follow Lacan's argument that the network of signifiers is a system of symbols, just as mathematics is a system of symbols, and if we accept his insight that there is a psycho-mathematical homeomorphism, then a question can be raised in connection to time. Objective—i.e., intersubjective—time is, according to Lacan, a product of speaking. If language, i.e., the symbolic, is a final product of a process that begins with the signifierisation of *jouissance*, then we seem to encounter one more circularity here, namely that time seems to be a product of a process that implicates time at its very core, i.e., signifierisation and the handling of the lack. Signifierisation is a way for the human being to manage what is not there. We saw Lacan claiming that “being is, as they say, and nonbeing is not. There is or there isn't.”¹⁸⁵ However, both *being* there and non-being have time as a prerequisite. Heidegger addresses the problem by introducing the *event*. Lacan accomplishes the same thing by introducing the object *a* and thematising desire as that which fuels the emergence of signifierness.

The challenge is, rather, to decide whether it is possible at all to look closely at phenomena that pertain to the speaking being; and, if it is possible, to find an appropriate way to study them. Lacan's position is tantamount to claiming that mathematical formalisation, especially in set theory and

¹⁸³ Cf. Lacan's early comment, in *Seminar III*, regarding “the discovery that consisted in observing one day that certain patients who complain of auditory hallucinations were manifestly making movements of the throat, of the lips; in other words, they were articulating them themselves.” Lacan, *Seminar III*, p. 49.

¹⁸⁴ Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts*, p. 180.

¹⁸⁵ Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p. 118.

topology, is the only tool that *ex-sists*—i.e., the only tool that can stand beside the phenomena—allowing us to study them for what they are, in an unmediated way.¹⁸⁶ He employs mathematics in an attempt to study the human psyche in the potentiality of its associative chains; his claim is that mathematics provides a robust foundation for the deeper understanding of psychic structures, subjective positions in the world, and psychopathology—an understanding that makes possible the development of tools for differential diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment.

From “anti-philosophy” back to philosophy

There has been a lot of discussion regarding Lacan’s stance in connection to philosophy. It is taken as a fact now that his turn to mathematics and the increasing obscurity of his teaching signalled a turn against philosophy, whatever the term “philosophy” is taken to mean. In his later period, Lacan is thought to have been an *anti-philosopher*, but what *this* means is not very clear either. True as it might have been that Lacan appeared to be engaged in an increasingly intense polemic against traditional metaphysics and ontology, in my opinion his position was exactly this—but not more than this: a position of forceful opposition against specific ideas and a specific tradition in philosophy.

Lacan’s first use of the term “antiphilosophy” appears in a 1975 text in which he presented the conditions required for the teaching of psychoanalysis: “Antiphilosophy”, he writes,

this is the name I’d like to give to the investigation of what university discourse owes to its ‘educational’ supposition. It is not the history of ideas, sad as it is, that will be able to face up to the challenge. A patient collection of all the idiocy that characterizes it will, I hope, allow to highlight it in its indestructible root, in its eternal dream. Of which there is no other awakening if not one’s own.¹⁸⁷

If we refuse to identify the term “philosophy” with any specific philosophical tradition, then Lacan’s position is no more anti-philosophical than the position of, say, the later Heidegger.

In Lacan’s view, the main lesson that could be learned from Freud was the importance of language, or rather, words: “not even the meaning of words, but words in their material aspect.”¹⁸⁸ Looking at it from the vantage point of temporal distance, Lacan’s four-plus decades of teaching seem to follow a rather clear trajectory.¹⁸⁹ Having initially focused on phenomena that he would eventually group together under the term “imaginary”, he turned after 1953 to language and to the symbolic dimension of human experience, emphasising their centrality to human experience (and, of course, psychoanalysis). The 10 years after 1963 were a period of clarification and recapitulation, during which Lacan focused on terms and concepts he had introduced earlier and elaborated on them. And finally, from 1974 until the end of his life, he returned to the triad of registers introduced earlier (real,

¹⁸⁶ By formulating Lacan’s project in this way I make here an implicit reference to Heidegger’s conception of phenomenology as a method of study.

¹⁸⁷ Lacan, ‘Peut-être à Vincennes...’, pp. 314-315 (my translation). See also Marini, *Lacan*, pp. 242-243. For a discussion of Lacan’s alleged antiphilosophy and how it is understood by A. Badiou and J.C. Milner see Adrian Johnston, ‘This Philosophy which is not One: Jean-Claude Milner, Alain Badiou, and Lacanian Antiphilosophy’ *Journal of the Jan van Eyck Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*, 3 (2010), 137-158.

¹⁸⁸ Lacan, ‘Of Structure’, p. 187.

¹⁸⁹ I am following here the periodisation from Michael Clark, *Jacques Lacan: An Annotated Bibliography, Vol. I* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988), pp. xxxiv-lxxii.

symbolic, imaginary) in an attempt to study their interrelations further, with the help of topology, the theory of knots and symbolic logic. This period of increased abstraction was also marked by his increased attention to the concrete reality of the body as the source and locus of the experience of the speaking being.

Thus, Lacan began by studying the human being and its obtaining an identity and a body by submitting to the other of language and the symbolic, and returned to the body by studying the fundamental role played by the real (i.e., the register of the unsignified effects of the world on the body) in what it is to be a human. Lacan's almost exclusive preoccupation with his mathemes and his knots during the latter part of his career was seen by many as a failure. As Roudinesco writes, "his entry into the world of knots led him to the destruction of what the matheme claimed to build. Lacan ... finally dissolved into the silent stupor of a Nietzschean aphasia."¹⁹⁰

Admittedly his teaching during this last period became more and more opaque—to the point that it appears as completely incomprehensible, if not incoherent and mystical. This might be so, especially when thought of in terms of the relative absence of concrete results. But it should not, in my view, distract our attention from Lacan's intention, which was to express issues of signification, history, suffering, and symptoms in the most unmediated way possible, in full recognition of the problem that there is no vantage point of metalanguage to facilitate this. To put it in somewhat Heideggerian terms, Lacan was attempting to formulate a fully ontological account of what a speaking being is (in the sense of *parlêtre*), what its structure is, and how it relates to other speaking beings in the world. His project, in other words, is consonant with Heidegger's in more than a few cursory or superficial ways. In the next and final chapter, I will focus on the points of contact as well as on areas of divergence between Heidegger and Lacan and will explore the possibility of a conceptual synthesis.



¹⁹⁰ Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan*, p. 359.

Chapter 6: Towards a conceptual synthesis

With *Being and Time* Heidegger invited us to rethink the question of the meaning of *being*, an obscure and confusing question of metaphysics, a question of limited interest for everyone except those studying the history of philosophy. Heidegger's insight was that our engagement with the world and the entities we encounter in it is never transparent. The world, ourselves, other entities, and beings—everything appears to us—human beings—in ways which are determined by, and dependent on, a historically determined framework of understanding that we have already and uncritically accepted. It was *this* that he called *being*. Accordingly, the question about *being* was mainly a question regarding our terms of engagement with *being*—i.e., a question of world-disclosure, historicity, and, most importantly, language.

In his critical discussion of science, psychology in general, and Freudian psychoanalysis in particular, Heidegger revealed what he saw as their limitations and naivety. For Heidegger, psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis fail to think critically about their conceptual premises, and therefore unwittingly obscure and distort the phenomena they are trying to study.

Lacan, with Freud's discovery as his starting point, and with a research programme quite unlike Heidegger's—namely, to reread this discovery in such a way that one remains faithful to its novelty, and yet avoids its misconceptions and pitfalls—had also turned to language in order to address the question of the human being's suffering. For Lacan, just as for Freud, the human being is not a master in his or her own house. The human being is a subject of language, a divided subject, subjected to the symbolic order—i.e., the law of the signifier. Language is both that which brings the subject into the human world and that which makes the subject suffer. But first and foremost, language, or rather *speaking*, is a ritualistic behaviour, an imitation game, a *halter* for jouissance and the real. The signified, or meaning, is always floating, unstable, and established retroactively.

Lacan turned to topology and knot theory in an attempt to formulate a non-regional post-Freudian discourse “metapsychology”, which would not be limited by the impossibility of reaching a proper meta-level of description. His attention became more and more withdrawn from the study of language and turned to the body and the real. Mathematics, set theory, and topology were for him symbolic systems that can ex-sist beside the phenomena of the human psyche and facilitate their study.

The difficulty of bringing Heidegger together with Lacan lies not only in the enormous differences in the two thinkers' terminology and fields of research, but also in the apparent disinclination of either of the two to lay the foundations for such a work. Notwithstanding this, a first obvious element connecting them is the importance they accord to language. For Heidegger, language is a special kind of *equipment*, both ontic and ontological, which discloses the world to Dasein. For Lacan, language qua symbolic order provides a scaffolding for the subject who is represented in the

chain formed by the signifiers comprising language. Differences in terminology notwithstanding, the parallels, as we have seen, are clear. The two thinkers talk about something similar—namely the constitution of a world through language—and have the same starting point, that of the individual human being who is *thrown* into this world and *subjected* to language. Most importantly, they coincide in their abandonment of the tools of tradition—that is, in their belief in the sheer inadequacy of traditional ontology and metaphysics.

With *Being and Time*, Heidegger set out to deconstruct traditional metaphysics in an attempt to raise again the question of *being* and construct a new, post-Cartesian fundamental ontology. This would serve as the foundation of all other *regional* ontologies—for example, those studied by traditional metaphysics, or those of the sciences. This project was, however, abandoned; in fact, Heidegger stopped using the term “ontology” altogether because he felt it was inadequate and misleading. He ceased conceiving of the question of *being* as a question of an ahistorical fundamental ontology and began approaching it as a question regarding the historicity of *being* (or *beyng*). Even though the principal themes of his research programme remained the same, Heidegger became more and more disillusioned with regard to the possibility of providing a comprehensive answer to it, deciding instead to focus on what he considered to be a major failure of modernity and an imminent danger to Dasein.

Lacan shared Heidegger’s distrust of traditional metaphysics. In his “return to Freud” the Heideggerian perspective was rather evident, even though he was not interested in constructing a post-Cartesian fundamental ontology as such. He did not specifically refer to Heidegger’s critique of Freud, but seemed to be aware of Heidegger’s arguments against Freud’s scientism. Lacan began by studying the human being and its attainment of an imaginary identity and a “language” body by submitting to the other of language and the symbolic; and he returned to the body by studying the fundamental role played by the real (i.e., the register of unsignified effects of the world on the body) in what it is to be a human.

Points of contact and divergence

Lacan and Heidegger knew each other, as we saw, and met more than once. But the details of an actual dialogue between them—if it ever took place—have not been made known. We know that Lacan remained full of respect for Heidegger, being “very fond of him” as he himself had put it.¹ His research led him to the core of issues that Heidegger too was interested in. For Lacan, as well as for Heidegger, the world is not a given. It is something that is opened to the human being through language. However, in contrast to Heidegger, Lacan is not at all interested in the meaning of *being* as such—or in *any* meaning, for that matter, insisting as he does on the primacy of the signifier over the signified. On the other hand, we know that Heidegger was not too impressed by Lacan’s “obviously baroque” style,² and that he remained unconvinced by his theories. It appears as if he had no patience with Lacan.

¹ See Lacan, *Seminar XXII*, p. 137.

² See Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 279.

In other words, it is obvious that the obstacles keeping the two thinkers apart cannot be underestimated or brushed aside easily.

It seems probable that Heidegger would still argue that psychoanalysis, even in its *enhanced*, Lacanian form, is a limited enterprise, able at best to help establish a regional ontology, but of no real use in addressing the questions that Heidegger was interested in: an explication of the source of meaningfulness for Dasein—*being*—and its historicity.

Such a criticism might appear convincing, but on closer inspection its scope appears limited. It fails to consider the bigger picture. Lacanian models and hypotheses—such as the three registers, the networks of signifiers, his theory of discourse, his attempts at mathematical formalisation—amount to something much broader than a regional ontology. They are not ontic descriptions of specific entities. Lacan's eventual aim, at least in connection to this issue, was not so very different from Heidegger's. But his trajectory—which led him to formal logic, topology, and knot theory—could not distance him further from Heidegger.

As we discussed earlier, Heidegger did not believe that mathematics is at all equipped to address the questions he was mainly interested in. For him, mathematics and logic could only contribute to a derivative understanding. Lacan's turn to mathematics and logic could only be understood by Heidegger as tantamount to claiming that they can stand *transcendentally* vis-à-vis the world, i.e., as little more than an uncritical conformance with the modern, Cartesian worldview of calculability. Faced with Lacan's mathematical formalisations, Heidegger would still probably either dismiss them as derivative and ontic—acknowledging in them not much more than a very a limited claim for a regional ontology—or reject them altogether as fascinating but arbitrary by-products of an artificial idealism very far distanced from the phenomena at hand.

Still, as we saw, Lacan's approach was not Platonic. He did not think of mathematical structures as existing independently of the humans using them; they were not thought as comprising the deeper structure of the world, or the human psyche; they were homeomorphic to them. It is only by speaking that the knots, schemas, or formulae that Lacan introduces ex-sist outside their imaginary or symbolic register.

For his part, Lacan would most probably be critical about Heidegger's research for the same reasons that impelled him to criticise the whole of philosophy. The crucial insight that Lacan brought to the table is that the subject of language, the speaking being, is under the sway of the signifier, and that *meaning* is always unstable, negotiable, subordinate to the law of the signifier, and retroactively established. Building on Freud's discovery—and in contrast to Heidegger—Lacan focused on the origins of *signifierness*, i.e., on the fact that there are signifiers and that these signifiers are interconnected. Indeed, one can read Lacan's whole theoretical work as an attempt to explain the emergence of signifierness, and to reach behind meaning, behind language, even behind speaking and speech. In a sense, he was trying to run *counter* to meaning—and he said as much.³

In Lacan's view, philosophers and metaphysicians are confused when discussing the question of *being* because they fail to see it as a product of *signifierness*. "*Being* is merely presumed in certain

³ Cf. *Seminar XX*: "The mathematical formalization of signifierness runs counter to meaning". Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p. 93.

words,” he said—“‘individual’, for instance, and ‘substance’. In my view, it is but a fact of what is said.”⁴ One could imagine then that, even if he had not made it explicit, Lacan would have counted Heidegger as just another confused philosopher. He would think of the Heideggerian attempt at a fundamental ontology, or at an exploration of the meaning of *being*, as trapped on the imaginary axis and therefore limited.

However, there might be a difficulty here. Lacan’s concepts appear to lack a proper foundation and it is necessary to clarify whether or not this is in fact the case. Richardson had written that Lacan’s interpretation of the Freudian discovery “desperately needs a philosophical base that mathematical formalism and all the topology in the world cannot give him.”⁵ In Richardson’s view, without a solid philosophical grounding, Lacan’s theoretical constructions would appear as magnificent but arbitrary constructions simply hanging in the air, just like some of the great philosophical systems of the past. Lacan’s project would run the risk of being eventually left behind as nothing more than a failed metaphysics.

Lacan’s insistence on the primacy of signifier, his insight regarding signifierness, and, accordingly, his unconcern for the signified are but conclusions, theoretical results, corollaries. They are related to the phenomenon under study, but they are *not* it, that is, they *are not* primary data. The same can be said about functions such as metaphor and metonymy, the three registers, the theory of discourse, and the Borromean clinic: all these hypotheses and theoretical models do not form part of, nor are they identical with, the phenomena as such. Lacan’s apparent circularity is connected to his employment of mathematics according to which certain structures of topology are homeomorphic to the deep structure of three registers; but you need the signifier in order to employ mathematics, consider the issues, and reach conclusions. The conceptual necessity of turning to mathematics is, in itself, a hypothesis, or a research programme, or at best a conclusion. It does not form part of the phenomena. In short, Lacan’s project seems to entail a circularity, similar to the circularity that Heidegger had in mind when he spoke about the *circle of understanding*.

Heidegger avoided this trap by asserting the sterility of such reasoning when studying first principles, in terms of both its formal and its factual validity. Would a similar argument be enough for Lacan? He certainly thought so, as his increasing reliance on the demonstrative qualities of his knotting models testifies. Lacan was very aware that there is no metalinguistic vantage point from which one can see the issues at hand more clearly, and he attempted to respond to the problem by showing how the structures of the psyche are homeomorphic to structures of mathematics, revealed within a frame of a language or semantic game, i.e., of a discourse.

In other words, considered from Lacan’s point of view, Richardson was wrong. Imposing a requirement for Lacanian metapsychology to have a solid philosophical base is, in this sense, problematic—as problematic as it would be to interrupt Heidegger’s project because of an alleged failure to recognise the essential circularity of Dasein’s comportment towards *being*.

Heidegger attempted to approach the question of *being* and construct a new post-Cartesian fundamental ontology. But he gave up this specific aspect of his project and began to focus on the

⁴ *Seminar XX*, p. 118.

⁵ Richardson, ‘The word of Silence’, p. 182. See also above, p. 82.

various ways in which *being* reveals itself to Dasein. This led him to what he called forgetfulness of *being*. He considered this as something that needs to be condemned and avoided. For Heidegger, adopting the modern worldview entails a discarding of fundamental aspects of Dasein's comportment towards *being*; accordingly, he made it his task to bring this question back to the fore, in an attempt to forewarn his readers. This was the attempt of a moral, or rather, of a *deontic* philosopher.

Heidegger's philosophy represents the next necessary cut with the world of modernity and paves the way for the emergence of the post-Cartesian subject. Lacanian metapsychology would not be possible were it not for the preparatory work that Heidegger has done with his questioning regarding the meaning of *being*. Heidegger's discussion of time and temporality cannot but be at the foundations of such a task. *Being* requires time, and without a primordial event of appropriation, there can be neither presence nor absence, and, in the same vein, no lack, or desire. Without time, there would be no signifiers, no signifying chain, no law of the signifier. This "time" that we are talking about here lies at a more basic level than Lacan's logical time, which is at the level of the (Lacanian) symbolic. Is Lacan's introduction of a language or semantic game, or more generally, of a *discourse*, enough to sidestep this limitation?

Further to this, Lacan's justification for using mathematics and topology would perhaps need to be rethought vis-à-vis a Heideggerian conceptual framework. As mentioned above, Heidegger would be critical of Lacan's approach. He would see it as representing the Cartesian point of view of modern science and sharing the ideal of mathematisation. However, for Lacan mathematics is not a formal system of *representation* but rather a structure homeomorphic to the psyche, one that can only be revealed in a fact of *saying*. In other words, mathematics for Lacan is *not* a metalanguage of the psyche. If, for Heidegger, language is the house of being, for Lacan *saying* (or speaking) reveals the plan of how this house was built.

On the possibility of a conceptual synthesis

In his later thinking, Lacan is moving away from language and meaning, and turning towards the real. As mentioned earlier, if this discussion is to be taken as something broader than a derivative regional ontology, it does indeed need to be founded on a robust base. One would first need to establish how a world is opened to the human being through language and what the source of world's meaningful presence is; it's only then that it would become possible to see that the human being, the subject of language, is in fact a decentred subject, a semblance, a product of recursive retroactive overlapping identifications, a made-up being. The first part of this task is accomplished by Heidegger. But Heidegger doesn't proceed as much as to provide a full account of the relation of language to the body. This is the task of Lacan.

It is conceivable, then, to see Lacan's theories as not incompatible with, but as complementary to, Heidegger's research programme. But this needs to be articulated properly. Lacan's project cannot (and should not) be fully wrapped in a stifling Heideggerian philosophical/phenomenological envelope. It is not a case of incorporating one system of thought in the framework of the other, nor it is a case of "translating" terms and concepts of one to that of the other. The paths of the two thinkers do not move parallel to each other; their divergences are as important as their convergences, at least in terms of the foundations of their respective conceptual constructions. What the two do share is their having

left traditional metaphysics and Cartesian dualism behind. Both represent a rupture with the past, “the closure of an entire epoch of thought and its concerns” as Badiou writes.⁶

At certain points, Lacan’s path appears to cross Heidegger’s, but they actually had very different agendas. Heidegger’s deontic worries and focus are far removed from Lacan’s concerns. Heidegger bemoaned the prevalence of the modern, scientific worldview. Lacan, on the other hand, could not but welcome its emergence and be “happy”, since it was the advent of the Cartesian subject—the subject of science—that made psychoanalysis possible. Crucially, Lacan was not a moralist; he was not interested in discussing human experience in a deontic framework, and was rather sceptical about attempts to rebel against the regime, seeing it as an attempt to replace a master’s discourse with another master’s discourse.⁷ In many respects Lacan was a pessimist who became less and less interested in politics or current affairs. He was only interested in showing in his mathemes the phenomena in the very way in which the phenomena show themselves from themselves. His teaching was a work in progress—a work that was destined to remain largely unfinished, as he himself was acutely aware.⁸

For these reasons, I think that a deeper dialogue between the two thinkers would be difficult. On the other hand, Heidegger’s work is propaedeutic to Lacan’s. To use Wittgenstein’s analogy,⁹ Heidegger provides a “ladder” that allows Lacan to climb up and see that the whole of philosophy is nonsensical, and justifies his turn away from meaning, towards the real. For this reason, an attempt at considering together some of the concepts, questions, hypotheses, and conclusions of the two would be perhaps useful. In this *conceptual synthesis*, some aspects of Heidegger’s analytic can be used to inform and support Lacan’s discourse metapsychology.¹⁰ On the basis of what has been discussed until now, I would see it as informed by the terminology, insights, concepts, hypotheses and conclusions of both Heidegger and Lacan, and involving a discussion about the human being as a being which is *being there* in language; about the world into which the human being finds itself thrown and about the ways of its comportment towards this world; about the ontological construction of a shared ontic world; as well as about the limits and the historicity of this world.

I suggest that it be provisionally called *Discourse Ontology (of the Speaking Being)*.

I choose to call it an *ontology* because it will be focusing on *being*, the term used here in Heidegger’s understanding, i.e., as the open space where a world can present itself as intelligible to the human being. I use the designation *discourse* in order to indicate the source of this intelligibility, on the basis of Lacan’s insight that truth, the world, and *being* are opened up to the human being

⁶ Badiou, *Being and Event*, p. 1.

⁷ See Lacan, ‘Impromptu at Vincennes’.

⁸ In 1957, he adds at the end of one of his papers the obscure abbreviation “T.t.y.e.m.u.p.t.” (See ‘Instance of the Letter’, p. 439/528.) This, as the translator of the *Écrits* in English reports, was explained by Lacan to mean, “‘Tu t’y es mis un peu tard’”, loosely translated as ‘You got down to it a bit late’.” *Écrits*, pp. 810n(528,6).

⁹ See proposition 6.54, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* [1921], trans. D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 74.

¹⁰ I am using the term synthesis here in its ordinary dictionary sense, i.e., as “the combination of parts, or elements, in order to form a more complete view or system”. See “*Synthesis*”, *Encyclopædia Britannica, Encyclopædia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite* (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 2015).

through a language game, i.e., a discourse.¹¹ Finally, I qualify it as a Discourse Ontology of the *Speaking Being* to emphasise and acknowledge the circularity involved: There is no way one can formulate an ontology that can ex-sist alongside the phenomena at a “meta” level unless one sees it as a product of a discursive activity. To paraphrase Lacan, just as there is no metalanguage, there can be no metaphysics. It all is “a fact of what is said”.¹²

In what follows I will first interject a preliminary discussion of five subthemes that are directly related to the questions Heidegger and Lacan were engaged with: the question of *being*; the question of *time*; the *unconscious*; the *body and mind split*; and the question of *discourse*. After this, I will present and discuss five basic themes of this conceptual synthesis. And at the end I will also append some indications of further lines of discussion that are opened up. Throughout this discussion, I will be referring to themes from Heidegger and Lacan as needed.

All this will inevitably involve some repetition, in the sense that several themes need to be approached from different angles, in a recursive or reiterative manner. Let me also emphasise that I do not intend to provide a full outline of a complete philosophical system; such an undertaking would be well beyond the scope of this thesis—and, indeed, quite premature.

Preliminary considerations

The question of being

According to Heidegger, reflecting on Dasein’s concerned comportment towards the entities it encounters is tantamount to acknowledging the question of *being* and reflecting on its meaning. Lacan, for his part, claims that there is no question of *being* as such. For him, *being* “is merely presumed in certain words ... It is but a fact of what is said.”¹³ In other words, *being* is nothing more than a designation for this linguistic space, or field, which is formed just by the very fact of speaking. For Heidegger, however, the question regarding the meaning of *being* is a question that refers to the foundations of the (human) world: *being* cannot be thematised except through language.

The difference is subtle but its repercussions are important. The world of beings is opened to Dasein as long as Dasein is thrown into language. It is language that that allows the world to uncover its worldly character to Dasein through *being*. But the thematisation of *being*, as well as language itself, are both historical; likewise, the question in connection to the meaning of *being*, which Heidegger raises, is also historical. Heidegger is very concerned and critical about our current epoch of modern science and technology, and argues that it comes with a set of unexamined presuppositions regarding *being*, which puts limits on the ways Dasein encounters *being* as well as other beings in the world.

One could paraphrase Heidegger here and claim that signifierness is the house of both *being* and time. But this would not be entirely accurate: Heidegger’s understanding of Dasein’s comportment

¹¹ Which is to say, that this is not an attempt to link Lacanian ideas with what is called discourse analysis in psychology. For such an attempt see Ian Parker, ‘Lacanian Discourse Analysis in Psychology: Seven Theoretical Elements’ *Theory & Psychology*, 15/2 (2005), 163-182 or David Pavón Cuéllar, *The Conscious Interior to an Exterior Unconscious: Lacan, Discourse Analysis and Social Psychology* (London: Karnac, 2010).

¹² Lacan, *Seminar XX*, p. 118.

¹³ *Seminar XX*, p. 118.

towards *being* involves an articulation of meaning. When Heidegger says that language is the house of *being*, he wants to show the historicity of the ways in which Dasein opens itself to *being*. This installs immediately a hierarchy of sorts, a moral hierarchy even, according to which certain ways of comportment are more complete, more rich, or even better than others. It is on this basis that Heidegger considers the adoption of the modern scientific worldview as an impoverishment.

Heidegger's criticism reflects, as we said above, the *deontic* aspect of his thinking, an aspect that is ontologically immaterial, especially when one considers the questions from a Lacanian point of view. For Lacan, the question is not whether one type of comportment is preferable to the other. The answers to such questions are given, according to Lacan, retrospectively, and are fleeting and changeable: they are confined to the level of the signified (qua meaning) and are, therefore, imaginary. In short: for Lacan, meaning is always an imaginary construction. It is circumstantial, malleable, unstable, and always retroactively renegotiable.

Indeed, Lacan is much more agnostic with regard to the meaning accorded to *being* by any given epoch. Lacan is not concerned about the particulars of meaning—in fact, he is not concerned about meaning at all. For Lacan, meaning is something disposable, a malleable “layer” that is *retroactively* established and made to correspond to the network of signifiers of a given speaking being. Lacan refrains from any value judgement about our current, or any other, epoch. What is important, for him, is what we could call the deep structure of the signifying network—which he considers to be homeomorphic with structures of topology or knot theory.

The question of time

Heidegger thinks of time as the horizon of *being* and explains that *being* and time determine each other reciprocally. He describes their being revealed together as an *event of appropriation*.

At the ontic level, time obtains a sense (i.e., a direction) via Death. At the ontological level, the sense of time is provided by the *event* which, itself, can be thought of as a-temporal. The ontic presence of beings before Dasein implies, and *requires* temporality, i.e., that what can allow them to “step outside” themselves, expanding into the three ecstases—or ex-stases—*future, present* and *past*. For Heidegger, Dasein is fundamentally oriented in time as a *being-towards-death*. Death, as the absolute possibility of the impossibility of any existence, provides Dasein with a trajectory and an end. Historicity is only possible because of the world and Death. Historicity allows Dasein to make something of oneself, in the sense that it provides Dasein with a history and a trajectory. These are unique for each and every human being; the present, however, is always shared.

For Lacan, objective time is a product of the function of the signifying chain. But time itself is a prerequisite for the differentiation between presence and absence, which, in itself, is the necessary step required for the establishment of signifiers. So time, in Lacan, is both a presupposition and a construct (qua temporality). In connection to its being a construct, Lacan stresses the discursive aspect of time in terms of a series of steps that cannot be arbitrarily ordered. It is this logical time that creates what humans perceive as the arrow of time, with the help of which they situate themselves and formulate their history.

One can distinguish, therefore, at least four aspects of time.

First is a primordial sense of time that is necessary as a backdrop, so to speak, on which all other kinds of time can be thematised. This is time as a horizon of *being*. Presence, absence, and repetition cannot be thematised without it. All further discussion is impossible unless this aspect of time is seen.

Then comes time as flow. This is the minimum required to conceptualise living as such. All living happens in a configurational frame of relations which we can, perhaps usefully, call “now” or “instant”, provided that we remember that what we designate as “now” or “instant” is ex-static, rather than static, referring to other adjacent configurational frames of relations. Duration is a derivative of the flow of time.

Time as temporality. This is the aspect of time that allows the thematisation of present, past, and future. Temporality might refer to minimal temporal differences such as the ones that we could describe, for example, with the words “now”, “earlier”, and “in a bit”; or to longer differences—for example, “these days”, “when I was young”, or “after the summer”.

Time as historicity. This refers to the characteristically human quality of having an awareness of coming *from* somewhere (the past), and going *towards* somewhere (the future), with an end point that is unavoidable, but just not here yet, namely *death*.

Unconscious and Psychoanalysis

Human beings qua subjects of language are under the sway of something that only makes itself seen through the disruptions it creates: this is what psychoanalysis calls the *unconscious*.

Designating something as “unconscious” is just assigning a name to an observation: *Unconscious* is a description of a mental function. The Freudian “revolution” entailed the recognition that the human being is not the master in his or her own (mental) house. He postulated the unconscious as this agency which could help re-establish a continuity for the fragmented data of consciousness. Lacan thought of conscious thinking as belonging in the realm of the law of signifier, of the Aristotelean *automaton*. In it, *jouissance* is deadened—in the sense that it has become fixed and presents no further surprises. The speaking being, qua divided subject, is only heard when there is a disruption of the chain of signifiers, where there is a gap. The gap, revealing desire, can surprise the speaking being and make it *stop and think*, as it were.

The unconscious, as a function, makes itself manifest via its functioning—the gap in the signifying chain, the interruption having been brought about by desire or lack. Its status, as Lacan claimed, is ethical: after Descartes we cannot avoid referring to it as that which breaks down the law of the signifier; we cannot avoid being taken aback by desire. Desire, however, can never be articulated as such. It can only be seen as the drive behind the functions that govern the interconnections between signifiers, i.e., metaphor and metonymy.

Heidegger criticised Freud’s reasons for postulating the unconscious by pointing out that it is necessary only when one is trapped in a naïve Cartesian subject–object understanding of the human being. In Heidegger’s view, all “conventional, objectifying representations of a capsule-like psyche, subject, person, ego, or consciousness in psychology and psychopathology [was to be] abandoned in

favour of an entirely different understanding.”¹⁴ This would involve the recognition that factual Dasein can be *absorbed* in its engagement with whatever it is engaged with; it’s only when something temporarily interrupts this absorption, that Dasein is forced to adopt an attitude that Heidegger described as *circumspective* or *theoretical*.¹⁵ In other words, and paraphrasing a bit, in Heidegger’s view you are only thinking “consciously” about something when there is an interruption of your absorbed involvement that forces you to change your attitude.

Heidegger’s criticism does not seem to apply to Lacan’s own understanding of the human being as a divided subject of language. For Lacan, the reflective subjectivity of human being, which is designated as “Ego, is an imaginary construction, a product of identification processes related to what he called the mirror stage. The Lacanian subject—a subject of language—is not identical with the subject as conceived by Freud or by Descartes.

Freud’s discovery allowed the psychic suffering of the human being to be properly thematised as a suffering dictated by language. Lacan’s reading of Freud enabled him to see that there is no foundation of truth other than that of what he called the real and *jouissance*, and that the world is created and inhabited by men “captured and tortured by language”.¹⁶ For as long as human beings are surprised by this fact, and feel the need to reflect on and articulate their surprise, approaching it as something that concerns them, psychoanalysis will continue to exist.

Beyond the body and mind split

The conceptions of Dasein and being-in-the-world were among Heidegger’s conceptual tools in his attempt to eliminate the problematic body-mind split argued by Descartes. For Heidegger, accepting this split reflects one’s uncritical adoption of the modern scientific, or Cartesian, worldview, according to which the body, or soma, needs to be differentiated from the mind, or psyche, because this is the only way it can be measured and studied scientifically, i.e., as an object. Sometimes this may be necessary, e.g., when thinking from the point of view of medical science or physiology; but many times it is tantamount to reducing the phenomena to something much more narrow—only because it’s more convenient.

In a similar vein, Lacan too rejects the naïve division between the somatic and the psychical by showing that the psychical is first and foremost somatic, corporeal, in the sense that it is there where its origins lie (i.e., *jouissance* and the three registers, real, imaginary and symbolic). Things become much more complicated, however, when one considers that the human being qua divided subject becomes alienated from the biological body it occupies. The human being obtains a language body through its introduction to language, and this language body is very distinct from the biological—in a way, it is the only body that ex-sists. In this sense it could be seen as if Lacan’s conceptualisation re-introduces the mind–body split—from the back door, as it were. But for Lacan this split is an imaginary

¹⁴ Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 4.

¹⁵ See *Being and Time*, pp. 408-410/356-359; and Dreyfus, *Commentary*, pp. 72-74.

¹⁶ Lacan, *Seminar III*, p. 243.

rather than a proper split—a semblance of a split, so to speak, which is only reflecting the differentiation between bodily *jouissance* and the signifier.

Discourse

Heidegger's insight that Dasein's comportment towards *being* is historical is correlative to Lacan's theory of the four discourses. Speaking generally, discourse is a term that describes the internal structure of the speaking being's comportment towards *being*, i.e., the structure of the signifying chain. The world a speaking being inhabits is reflected in the structure of the signifying chain, but the structure itself conforms to the specificities of a discourse. To be a subject of language always involves a specific discourse in which the human being participates. To speak of consciousness or of an unconscious only became possible because of the emergence of a specific discourse; it can only make sense to participants in a specific discourse, namely the hysteric and the analytic discourse respectively—the hysteric discourse being the discourse of the subject of science, and the analytic discourse being the one that allows the cause of desire to be thematised.

Lacan's theory of the four discourses and his other, later theoretical constructions, such as topology or the theory of knots, are a-historical—i.e., ontological—attempts to study the phenomena at hand. They are a-historical in the sense that they are non-factual. They are independent of specific discourse configurations and structures.

At any given moment, every speaking being participates in a number of discourses. But one of these discourses predominates, providing a common backdrop, something like a *zeitgeist*, which can be called a *historical epoch*. The distinction between the ancient and the modern worldviews reflects an underlying periodisation of discourses. The emergence of the modern world can be understood better if we think that there was a change in the way the predominant discourse thematises truth and science.¹⁷

It is important to stress in this connection, however, that for Lacan there is no temporal or other hierarchy between the discourses. Each discourse represents a formulation of what is at stake for the speaking being and the general outline of how this happens. In other words, Lacan, in contrast to Heidegger, is rather agnostic in regard to the way things evolve. He acknowledges that the emergence of what he called the subject of science was made possible by the modern, Cartesian worldview; he acknowledges further that it is because of this that psychoanalysis itself was made possible—namely, because of the emergence of the analytic discourse. Nevertheless, there is no inherent reason for this state of affairs to persist. The future of psychoanalysis is not dependent on some truth that was revealed and should now be guarded; it's only dependent on those speaking beings who will desire to keep it going.

¹⁷ This would perhaps allow us to understand why there are cultures less favourably disposed towards psychoanalysis: they might be conforming to a different kind of predominant discourse.

Five themes of a Discourse Ontology

I will discuss now five basic themes of the conceptual synthesis that I have provisionally called *Discourse Ontology (of the Speaking Being)*, referring again to concepts and formulations from Heidegger and Lacan as needed. Each theme is distinct and yet overlaps with the others. The themes are: *Speaking being*; *Language*; *Body*; *World*; and *Truth*.

Speaking being and the emergence of signification

The starting point will be the *human being* in its being human. Heidegger's term *Dasein*—i.e., the human being considered ontically, in its factual existence, and ontologically in its concerned comportment towards *being* and the world it creates—is very close to, but not identical to, Lacan's *parlêtre* (or *speaking being*). By choosing to use the term “Dasein”, Heidegger drew on a linguistic tradition that took the term as synonymous with “human being”, drawing a measure of attention to the spatial aspect of being human. For Heidegger, the human being, qua *Dasein*, is (ontically) a localised being, a being (in German: *Sein*) that *is here* (in German: *da*): Da-Sein. He identified *inquiring* “as one of the possibilities of its *being*,”¹⁸ and described as “care” *Dasein*'s concerned comportment towards the beings it encounters.

Lacan's term, *parlêtre*, draws attention to the fact that the human being is a being that speaks and has a world *because* it speaks. For Lacan, speaking as such is a “behaviour”, characteristically—but not uniquely—human. What is unique, for the human being qua speaking being, is that speaking involves a domain of recursive consensual coordination of distinctions, actions, or interactions with other human beings—i.e., a big Other, or, to put it differently, a discourse. Every speech act takes place within a domain that gives a *sense* to this act—the term “sense” being understood here both as meaning and as direction. If there were no speaking, there would be nothing to comport concernfully towards, i.e., there would be no *being*.

Speaking as such is a specific type of intentional coordinated bodily activity, the “prototype” of which can be found in the intentional consensual interaction between two or more speaking human beings. This interaction creates a field where further consensual interaction (speaking, talking, doing) is possible. This field provides the backdrop for the emergence of *meaning*. “Meaning” is a consensual retroactive attribution of relations of inter-correspondence between chunks of speech qua *lalangue*: any given chunk of speech becomes a signifier, i.e., becomes a word.

By stating that the attribution of meaning is consensual, I am simply stressing the fact that the meaning of an utterance is implicitly reaffirmed every time it brings about consistent—i.e., not unexpected—results.¹⁹ The stream of utterances (i.e., *lalangue*) is retroactively being cut into identifiable speech elements called words, which become signifiers and are consensually made to correspond to other identifiable speech elements as their definitions, descriptions, etc. Establishing a

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 27/7.

¹⁹ For instance, a human infant might at some point say something like *mah-mah-mah-mah*; it is in the possible reaction of the primary carer that this utterance will become, for the infant, a reference to the carer and obtain the meaning “mother”. In other words, from some moment onwards, the babbling *mah-mah* will be taken as the word (or signifier) *mama*, and will be accepted as referring to that woman, i.e., to “mother”.

correspondence is tantamount to saying that the signifier obtains a signified; thus a linguistic sign is created. To generalise a bit, this is both how language seems to have been created and how it is acquired by the newborn human infant: by establishing inter-correspondences between chunks of speech, i.e., rendering them into signifiers. And it is in this where Heideggerian *being* is to be found, namely in that, speaking qua coordinated interaction between human beings creates a field where the emergence of significations, i.e., meaning—or to put it more generally, *signifierness*—is possible. In other words, in Lacan's view, language—more precisely: speaking—brings *being* by giving it a (linguistic) space, or field, where it can be presumed. This process is transparent and spontaneous, and readily recedes into the background. We, as human beings participating in it, lose sight of it. It is in this sense that Heidegger speaks of the “forgetfulness of *being*”.

Signifierness involves desire, and desire is founded on lack. Signifiers are chunks of *jouissance* that stand as pointers to other signifiers, and eventually to a lack. In the process of signifierisation, *jouissance* is taken out of circulation: it is crystallised or *cadaverised* in the form of a signifier. In their dealings with the world, human beings create increasingly complex networks of interconnected signifierised *jouissance*, with multiple levels of overdetermination. These networks are unique to each human being in such a way that we can say that in the interconnections between signifiers—the chain of signifiers—the individual speaking being is represented. In short, the subject, as well as its world, is a “product” of the signifierisation process.

For each and every individual human being qua speaking being, signifiers form a network. It is in this sense that Lacan defines a signifier as that which represents the subject of language to another signifier. If we recall that desire is involved in every signifier, then we can reformulate this by saying that the speaking being is represented by a unique configuration of desire—a desire to return to the original *jouissance*, which is actually not there anymore.

Truth as a rule-governed activity

Truth can be defined as that which is given or accepted as given. It is, in other words, an ontological concept that should not be confused with the concept *truth* in its ontic sense, i.e., in the sense of the truth value—or veracity—of a statement. Ontological truth is correlative to signifierness; it always involves the field of consensual interactions between speaking beings and always reflects the “sense” that something is “at stake”; it does not have much to do with the veracity of statements or veracity as such. It is not a correspondence of a statement with a state of affairs. Drawing on the work of Hintikka, we can say that ontological truth is constituted as a language game or, rather, as a game of speaking—i.e., a discourse. In other words, truth is always involved in any structure of discursive relation and can be thought of as its backdrop (or point of reference). In their interactions, speaking beings always have recourse to this truth and refer to a lack in order to create a symbolic system that provides the framework for a social bond. *Ontic* truth becomes an issue when speaking beings are involved in the same “type” of discourse and “agree”, so to speak, with the terms or rules of a “game”. A statement is validated or accepted as (ontically) true when the game can be “won”. States of affairs are aspects of *being* and as such cannot be thematised unrelatedly to language. Both a statement and a state of affairs are on the same level. In other words, truth value, or veracity, is defined within the boundaries of a discourse, without any need for resort to a metalanguage.

Truth conceived thus is not far from Heidegger's conception of truth as *a-letheia*, in the sense that for Heidegger, too, truth is not understood as correspondence between a language and a world, but rather as an acceptance and an appropriation of *being*—i.e., of a world and whatever it comprises—and time. What brings them together is that, for both Heidegger and Lacan, truth is not seen as the product of a judgement but rather as an acceptance, which, for Heidegger, constitutes what he calls an *event of appropriation*, and, for Lacan, has the form of what Freud had in mind when he spoke of a primordial affirmation.

The two men's conceptualisations of truth are not identical either. Their main difference seems to be related to the function attributed to truth: For Heidegger, truth qua *a-letheia* is related to *being* and its opening up to *Dasein*. For Lacan, truth is related to speaking as such. As soon as I speak, I speak the truth (or, perhaps, truth is spoken through me). Truth, then, means that I accept that I am the subject of language. For Lacan, nothing is revealed to the human being; rather, something is *missing* from the human being, and in the place of this lack the divided subject emerges as a speaking being. Speaking represents an affirmation, i.e., truth.

From this simple conception of ontological truth as acceptance, and of ontic truth as the outcome ("win" or "lose") of a *game* within a given discourse, we can preliminarily describe knowledge as that set of ontic narratives that are, or can be, accepted, believed, confirmed, or debated on a field of exchanges by speaking beings. Knowledge, in other words, can be thought as a set of articulated narratives that refer in various different ways (acceptance, belief, verification, etc.) to states of affairs. On the level of the individual speaking being, knowledge is a recursive construction—a kind of systematic and articulated *lalangue*, one might say—that involves a recursive self-referential network of signifiers and some of their interconnections.

From language and speaking, to time

The question of speaking—both in the obvious, ordinary sense of the term as well as in the sense of the term described immediately above, i.e., of speaking as a type of intentional coordinated activity—is closely related to the question of language. When human beings speak, they intend to convey something; language is the guarantor, so to speak, of speaking as such—the consensual backdrop that gives a sense (or a meaning) to the activity of speaking.²⁰ What is at stake, when there is speaking, is a way of engaging with the other—i.e., other human beings—as well as with the (big) Other. This is what discourse is—the internal structure of the subject's submission to language and of the constitution of social reality.

Language is a structure that all human beings are thrown into. We can describe language, in general, as a formal system of interconnected signs of a specific nature. In the case of natural, human language, the signs are *linguistic* and defined as comprising a signifier and a signified. The meaning of the signifier—i.e., its signified—is unstable, unclear, movable, flowing.

The world is opened via the signifier. What is revealed is the possibility of a meaning, not a specific meaning itself. Lacan calls this *signifierness* and says that to the traditional *being* of philosophy

²⁰ Cf. Lacan, 'Function and Field', pp. 227-229/274-276.

he opposes the “*being of signifierness*”.²¹ The signifier, of course, can be seen as an ontic as well as an ontological concept. Ontologically, it corresponds to *signifierness*—i.e., the establishing of consensual inter-correspondences between words, qua signifiers, and signifieds.

Speaking is a bodily activity. It involves *jouissance*. The emergence of signifierness imposes a structure on *jouissance* by enforcing the distinction between signifierised and not-yet-signifierised *jouissance*. At the heart of the subject of language is a lack. When a signifier is established, when *jouissance* is made into signifiers, there is always a leftover, a “remainder” *jouissance* that has not yet been signifierised. Signifierised *jouissance* is always *pointing* to an absence, namely the absence of what is being signified. This means that, for every speaking being, the very activity of speaking brings to the fore an absence (or a lack, as Lacan would put it). The corollary of lack is *desire*. Any signifier that points to an absence—i.e., to a lack—refers to a desire which is caused by the remainder, not-yet-signifierised, *jouissance*, or its object: object *a*.

Speaking happens in time. I use the term *time* here in the most primordial sense of a backdrop according to which any activity—speaking, in this case—has a beginning, a duration, and an end. The emergence of signifierness makes this temporal aspect of speaking visible in that the speaking being needs to *wait* until the “end” of a clause of speech in order to get to what is intended by it, i.e., to its meaning. Signifierness presupposes time and involves it ontically in the sense just mentioned—namely, that of time as duration—as well as ontologically.

The later Heidegger understood *being* as the opening, or clearing, where entities are encountered; and time as *presence*. What Lacan brings to this is an understanding of how presence can be thematised vis-à-vis *absence*. In fact, to say that presence can be thematised is tantamount to saying that signifierness is possible. If presence can be thematised, then time—as well as *being*—can also be thematised. Signifierness—and retroaction—give direction to time and allow the present, the past, and, by implication, the future to be thematised.

Body and sexuation

For Lacan, the body is the locus where all happens. There is a specific aspect of Lacan’s discussion of the body’s engagement with the world that in Heidegger is not at all thematised. It pertains to what Lacan presents under the rubric of *jouissance*: *jouissance* is the (traumatic) product of the body’s structural coupling in the world. As a concept it is both ontic and ontological; it’s ontic in the obvious sense of the circumstantial details of the specifics of this or that event of the body that gave rise to it, but also ontological in the sense that it gives rise to signifierness.

The material body qua biological organism is not identical to the body as conceived or experienced by the speaking being. In order to “obtain” a body, the human being qua divided subject needs to “be given” an image (mirror stage) and language (the symbolic order).

Jouissance is a correlative of Dasein’s being-in-the-world: The human being qua Dasein cannot but be-in-the-world. And *being-in-the-world* cannot but mean that there is *jouissance*. It is precisely *because* there is *jouissance* that the human being is opened up to signifierness. Signifierness is that

²¹ *Seminar XX*, p. 71.

what opens the clearing for a signifier to be installed, and a signifier is what allows *jouissance* to be thematised. It appears, then, that Lacan, having conceptualised *jouissance*, allows for a discussion of the primordial revelation of *being* that Heidegger envisages, without recourse to the meaning of a world that—for Heidegger—*being* entails.

Jouissance populates the register of the real. By submitting to language, the human being obtains an image of the body and an identity with which the human being occupies or inhabits it. In the process, some of the body's *jouissance* *freezes*, populating the imaginary and symbolic registers. The remainder *jouissance* becomes a cause for the emergence of desire.

In becoming a *subject* of language—i.e., a speaking being—the human being remains tormented by a tension between the body as an *ontic* entity (i.e., a thing) and the body as an imaginary entity that the speaking being inhabits. This tension could be understood as correlative to Heidegger's insistence that the body is far away from *Dasein* *despite* appearing to be very near to it.

For Heidegger, the question of the body is extremely important but obscure. According to several of his critics, his treatment of the question leaves much to be desired. It is, however, clear that, from Heidegger's point of view, his ontological project would be incompatible with a discussion of the question of the body as such, which verges on the *ontic*. He sees space as something that is disclosed to *Dasein* through its bodiliness, and points out that even though the actual (*ontic*) body is a corporeal thing with specific dimensions, *Dasein* is not confined in it; it rather, *Dasein* is beyond the limits of the corporeal thing. Heidegger says little about the *ontic* aspects of the body (especially sex), struggling, apparently, with how to approach it *without* falling in the trap of the Cartesian mind/body distinction. Also, he does not seem at all interested in studying (or being able to see) the role sex plays in shaping *Dasein*'s picture of the world. *Dasein* is conceived as ontologically neutral; its neutrality is, of course, broken as soon as we consider *Dasein* in its factual concretion, but ontologically *Dasein* is neither masculine nor feminine. This is Heidegger's premise, and his analysis proceeds from there.

This, clearly, is very different from Lacan's view. For Lacan, the question of sexual position, or sexualisation, is crucial *ontologically*. For Lacan, the two positions, feminine and masculine, are fundamentally different. Granted, *jouissance* is asexual, at least in the beginning, but as soon as some of it is signified, it becomes differentiated in phallic *jouissance* and other *jouissance*. The difference between the feminine and masculine positions represents a difference in the manner of a subject's alienation in language, and its submission to the phallic function—it is *not* a biological reality.

World

The speaking being is concerned about *being*, in the sense that Heidegger gives to this term. *Being*, as we said, can only be an issue when signifierness has emerged, a process that, for the speaking being, is equivalent to the emergence of what we call *world*. Of course, these are phenomena that take place equiprimordially: the world emerges together with signifierness and is revealed together with *being*. We spoke earlier about the creation of a field where signifierness is possible. The world is this field. This process too is transparent, in the sense that the emergence of the world becomes invisible and forgotten.

For Heidegger the world is not an empty container that Dasein inhabits. Dasein is fundamentally *in* the world, as denoted by the compound expression *being-in-the-world*, in the sense that there is no ontological (or ontic, for that matter) way to separate one from the other. In fact, the human being is essentially a world-forming being; *being* is opened to human beings via language. Material objects, such as a stone or a chair, do not have a world (they are “worldless”); animals are “poor in world”; and human beings are “world-forming”, and their world is a shared world.²²

The question of the world is thematised by Lacan indirectly. The world that the subjects of language share is a world revealed and guaranteed by the symbolic order and the signifier. It is an ontic world of signifiederised jouissance, and as such it is not primarily a world of meaning: its “meaning” is established retroactively, in a sort of a secondary revision, whereby the network of the signifiers is being interconnected with the network of signifieds via quilting points. The world is *shared*, in the sense that each and every one of us is subject to a symbolic order that was established beforehand, but also *private* in the sense that every subject has added his or her own signifiers and has created his or her own network of meanings (signifieds).

Some further themes

Further to the five basic themes presented above, we are now brought face to face with some further themes that are opened up on the basis of the discussion thus far. I intend to outline some of them here, and discuss them, albeit cursorily, but it has to be emphasised, however, that there are many more lines of discussion that are opened and could be followed.

Mathematics as discourse

Lacan thought of mathematics as a process of manipulating symbols on a piece of paper according to certain rules for their exchanges, transformations, and arrangements. The symbols are not imitating any objects or entities of the world. They are completely detached from their origins, in the sense that their origins, i.e., what they are meant to represent—for example the divided subject (written as $\$$), the master signifier (written as S_1 , or the symbolic phallus (written as Φ —do not affect what you can do with them. So, for example, having introduced the matheme of the discourse of the master, Lacan applies an anti-clockwise quarter-turn operation on it, and in the process constructs three other formulas. He does not take into account what the features of the entities represented by his symbols are—admittedly, they are very different from one another—and he doesn’t explain why he suggests this transformation instead of any other; he simply asserts that “there are other reasons for this quarter turn than some pure accident of imaginary representation”,²³ and leaves it there.

Mathematical formalisation creates a semblance of transparency, abstraction, and transcendence. Lacanian mathemes are thought of as illustrating specific structures, relationships, and dependencies that emerge in the real, and they do so in an entirely symbolic manner. The twist lies in that whatever the matheme may be, you still need a human being to talk about it. Lacanian mathemes,

²² Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts*, p. 177.

²³ Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, p. 14.

in all their abstraction, cannot be thought of independently of human beings engaging with them. In general, the mathematics that Lacan is interested in—set theory, topology, knot theory—is always something that is written and spoken about; it is a human activity in time, a kind of discourse. It cannot be thought of independently of this discourse. In this sense, Lacan's views could be described as a type of *discursive formalism*.²⁴

Derivation of spatiality

Heidegger had originally attempted to derive human spatiality from temporality, but later he admitted that this was untenable.

For Heidegger, space is thematised by Dasein via the body. The body is in space in an ontological sense: space is opened, or disclosed, to Dasein through Dasein's bodiliness and not the other way around. This involves the human being in its localised sense (the "Da" or "here" of Dasein) as well as its reach beyond corporeal limits, via the gaze and also via sound. He criticises the naïve conceptualisation of being-in-the-world in terms of a distinction between a bodily/psychic interior (i.e., subjectivity) and an exterior (i.e., objectivity), and stresses the "ecstatic" aspect of bodiliness.²⁵ And there he remains: he does not seem willing (or prepared) to look into this phenomenon more closely.

Lacan attempts to tackle the superficiality of the interior/exterior distinction with the help of quasi-paradoxical mathematical objects such as the one-sided, one-edged Möbius strip or the closed-surfaced Klein bottle, which has no inside or outside. However, Lacan did not seem willing or prepared to recast his own research in terms of a systematic phenomenological exposition. He employs his mathematical objects and insights as partial suggestive illustrations and nothing more.

It seems, in other words, that both Lacan and Heidegger set out from a similar starting point, their rejection of the naïve subject–object distinction of tradition, but they decide to look at different facets of the same issues. It would be important, then, to formulate a proper post-Cartesian phenomenology of the speaking being's spatiality as a being-in-the-world, focusing on aspects of the speaking being qua body, such as the use of the bodily functions (eating, breathing, defecating, urinating), orifices (oral, anal, genital), or organs (eye, ear, nose, skin), etc.

The ontological difference revisited: Primary, and second-order phenomena

Based on Lacan's insight into meaning as being established in consensual retroactive attribution of relations of inter-correspondence between chunks of speech, one could formulate hypotheses with profound repercussions both for our understanding of phenomena that involve meaning in some way—such as (conscious) reflection, conscious thinking, re-cognition or memory—and also for our understanding of mental deficiency or illness.

We can only think consciously of conscious thinking because we already operate in language, i.e., in a field where consensual linguistic interaction is possible. Conscious thinking is *public* despite

²⁴ It has to be clarified here that I am only using this term because I want to emphasise the (circular) constitution of Lacan's formalism within a discourse—as understood by Lacan.

²⁵ See for example Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, p. 91

the fact that it takes place in private. It follows from this that attempts to study it *in vitro*, as it were, i.e., with no reference to the public field where it becomes possible, are unavoidably incomplete and destined to fail.

The first step here would be the recognition that these are not primary phenomena. Indeed, they cannot be considered outside the framework established by the meaning that has been retroactively attributed to them: one could more accurately describe them as second-order phenomena, underlying which one or more other, first-order phenomena can be observed, postulated, or hypothesised. What this means, in practical terms, is that a complex second-order phenomenon (such as, for example, speaking) cannot be adequately understood unless thought of in terms of a number of more elementary first-order phenomena (such as hearing, breathing, articulating), which are intertwined and interconnected. This, of course, is meant to be just an indication of the approach to be followed, and not a complete inventory of the steps involved, which would remain within the remit of an appropriate regional ontology.

In an case, it is necessary to see that these phenomena and the underlying first-order phenomena stand in a type of relation similar to the one that linguists designate as *duality of patterning*. This relation, or rather the distinction it implies, needs to be read in connection to Heidegger's ontological difference. It is only after establishing that second-order phenomena are exactly that—namely, second-order and not first-order—that we can begin to account for the role played in them by retroaction and thus avoid conceptual pitfalls.

As an example, we could focus on our current difficulties in properly understanding the impact of gradual mental impairment or dementia on personality, sense of identity, and “character”. Rather than regarding the variety of clinical manifestations of mental deficiency as the more or less direct behavioural result of pathological processes involving one, two, or several hypothetical brain subsystems, one could see them as the result of the individual's attempt to retroactively undo the gaps that appear in their thinking because of their illness, in much the same way that people attempt to smooth out the gaps they observe when they think of one of their dreams (i.e., what Freud called *secondary revision*).

It is conceivable that many phenomena of cognitive and thought decline—phenomena that result from organic damage traceable to illness such as, say, vascular dementia or Alzheimer's disease—could be better understood if studied in the same way as those psychopathological phenomena that Freud focused on: namely as increasingly failing attempts by the suffering speaking being to retroactively establish a second-order discursive coherency in an ever more fragmented mental space.

These are but preliminary thoughts. The implications of such an approach could well prove to be noteworthy, but they decidedly lie outside the scope of this thesis.



Conclusion

Lacan was a medical doctor who trained as a psychiatrist. Influenced by the intellectual climate of early 20th century, he turned to Freud in an attempt to further his understanding of what we could vaguely call mental illness or suffering. Widely read in philosophy, the sciences, literature, and other fields, Lacan remained until the end of his life dedicated to issues pertaining to psychic life and suffering.

Heidegger was planning to become a priest, but, after changing his mind, went on to study mathematics and then turned to philosophy. He remained dedicated to philosophy until the end of his life. Heidegger was very sceptical of the course that metaphysics had taken since the time of the ancient Greeks and, with a view to challenging tradition and deconstructing Western philosophy, sought to bring back some of the originality and incisiveness of their questioning.

We saw how Lacan drew on philosophy initially, and then on mathematics, in order to find the conceptual tools he felt he needed in order to develop his ideas further and bring them together in a coherent and robust conceptual structure. His theories always had the air of a work in progress. It is evident to anyone looking more carefully at the content of his teaching and the style of his delivery that he felt he did not have enough time to bring everything to a proper closure.

If Lacan was becoming more and more anxious to proceed with his work and less and less willing to be concerned about possible misunderstandings on the part of his audience, Heidegger moved in the opposite direction, gradually distancing himself from teaching and only writing and presenting increasingly short papers.

Heidegger rejected the naïve Cartesian view of the human being as a subject standing vis-à-vis the world as object by pointing out that such a view neglects and distorts phenomena. For Heidegger, the human being qua Dasein is the clearing in which a world is opened as truth and shared: in its concerned comportment towards beings, Dasein allows *being* to be opened up and shared, and in this way undertakes a task that Heidegger called the *task of thinking*.

Heidegger criticised Freud on the basis of what he took to be Freud's uncritical adoption of a naïve scientism, directly inherited from the 19th-century worldview that Freud presumably shared. For Heidegger, the belief that science progresses by collecting "objective" data, formulating hypotheses, and creating testable theories has limited scope and fails to question the presuppositions, foundations, and historicity of any scientific method. What is missing from the 19th-century view is, according to Heidegger, an understanding of the question of *being*, i.e., a careful reconsideration of the ways in which the world is opened up and revealed to human beings (to Dasein). It is this consideration that would reveal science as a historical enterprise and expose its limitations in connection to the applicability of its methods to the study of Dasein. The question of mental determinism, which lies at the heart of Freud's project, is in that sense a question that is formulated in a problematic way. It involves the uncritical adoption of an inapplicable research programme—the intention to study the

psyche as if it were an independently existing and observable object—with the help of inapplicable hypotheses. For Heidegger, the issue is a non-issue, and therefore the whole theoretical structure of psychoanalysis collapses.

As I have argued here, Heidegger's critique of modern science and psychoanalysis is something that psychoanalytic theory cannot afford to ignore. Psychoanalytic metapsychology is vulnerable to it and needs to be able to respond.

Approaching Lacan's work, it becomes evident that he took Heidegger's critique very seriously. Lacan, a student of Koyré, shared with Heidegger a theoretical understanding of the historical nature of science. He recognised that Freud's research programme would not have been possible prior to the advent of what he (Lacan) called the "subject of science". Contrary to how it would appear at first sight, however, for Lacan a *subject of science* is neither a subject that adopts scientific methods—i.e., a scientist—or the human being as a subject of scientific research. It is, rather, the subject that is surprised by the products of his or her own psyche, which he or she then considers as concerning him or herself. The subject of science is the doubtful Cartesian subject who is perplexed—and sometimes disturbed—by his or her own desire. Becoming a subject of science involves, in Lacan's view, a change in one's relationship to one's *jouissance*. It was this that made Freud's discovery possible. In Lacan's understanding, Freud did not uncover for us the workings of a fully deterministic "mental" apparatus that had previously remained hidden: what he discovered was that the human psyche is subject to the law of the signifier. The importance of this law, however, does not lie in its determinism. On the contrary, it becomes important at the loci where it breaks down.

Lacan too rejected the Cartesian view on the basis that the subject of thinking (the ego of cogito) never occupies the same place as the subject of language. Lacan showed that the speaking being is not a Cartesian subject that can find certainty and truth. As a subject of language, the human being is a decentred subject, a semblance, a product of recursive retroactive overlapping identifications, a made-up being that goes around pretending to be what it is not.

Both thinkers represent a cut with the past. In repositing the ontological question and demonstrating its historicity, Heidegger revealed the limitations and impasses of modernity, and opened a clearing in which truth, knowledge, science, and the human being can be thought of and thematised anew. In outlining the discursive structures in which the speaking being partakes and deconstructing the foundations of subjectivity, Lacan broke with the traditional approaches of philosophy. Ontology and metaphysics are not feasible. The traditionally conceived truth of correspondence and adequation is a myth, a result of a compromise—a language or discursive game.

This leaves us with psychoanalysis, Freud's invention, which allows us to see that there is no foundation of truth other than that of the real and *jouissance*, and that the world is created and inhabited by men "captured and tortured by language".¹

In this thesis, I attempted to address the question of whether a theoretical convergence between Heideggerian philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis is possible or useful. In addition to having similar understandings of the historicity of science, Lacan and Heidegger coincided in their contempt for traditional metaphysics and ontology. Towards the end of his teaching, Lacan advocated

¹ Lacan, *Seminar III*, p. 243.

a kind of anti-philosophy, while Heidegger, after his so-called turn, abandoned both the traditional vocabulary of metaphysics and his attempt to formulate a post-Cartesian fundamental ontology.

I have concluded that even though Lacanian metapsychology can be seen as not incompatible with Heidegger's research programme, and that there are quite a few points where the path of Lacan crosses that of Heidegger, the two do not coincide. Lacan and Heidegger agree on what language does—it discloses/constructs a world—but they diverge in their understanding of what it all *means*. For Heidegger this question presents itself as the most essential in any kind of thinking—in effect it becomes a task for Dasein, a moral telos. Lacan, on the other hand, believes that meaning is volatile, overdetermined, and “decided” retroactively.

In many respects Heidegger shows himself to be a moralist, while Lacan appears as an agnostic cynic, and this makes futile any direct attempt at reconciling their differing opinions and at making their conclusions fully compatible. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that Lacan's and Heidegger's aims and objectives were openly different. Lacan was a psychoanalyst, and his theoretical efforts were meant to help him and his students in their clinical work. Lacan's seminar, even though open to the public, was a seminar designed to teach and orient clinicians who practiced or intended to practice psychoanalysis. Heidegger, on the other hand, was not a clinician. He was a philosopher who decided to address clinicians only because he thought that they were using unexamined concepts and methods, to the detriment of their subject matter and their patients.

And yet, as I have argued, a conceptual synthesis is possible. The name that I gave to it is *Discourse Ontology (of the Speaking Being)*. As explained above, it *is* an *ontology*—in the sense that it concerns *being*, i.e., the open space where a world can present itself as intelligible to the human being—with the designation “*discourse*” indicating the source of this intelligibility, and the qualification “*of the Speaking Being*” serving to emphasise and acknowledge the circularity involved. It is informed by the terminology, insights, concepts, hypotheses, and conclusions of both Heidegger and Lacan, and entails discussions about the human being as a being which is *being there* in language; about the world into which the human being finds itself thrown and about the ways of its comportment towards this world; about the ontological construction of a shared ontic world; and about the limits and the historicity of this world.

This Discourse Ontology provides us with the tools we need to understand how psychoanalysis became possible, what psychoanalysis reveals about the speaking being, and what its limitations are. Freud had wanted his theory to be accepted and respected as a new science, but now we can see that even though psychoanalysis is indeed a product of the modern worldview, it is one that allows us to break with the limitations of the discourse this worldview entails.



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